

S E R M O N S

UPON

SEVERAL SUBJECTS.

BY

WILLIAM ADAMS, D. D.

LATE MASTER OF PEMBROKE COLLEGE, OXFORD,

AND

ARCHDEACON OF LLANDAFF.

SHREWSBURY:

PRINTED BY J. AND W. EDDOWES.

MDCCXC.

LLYFRGELL
GENEDLAETHOL
CYMRU

PREFACE OF THE AUTHOR.

THE design of the Author in committing these sheets to the press, was to give, or, more probably, to leave a few copies of them to such of his friends, as he thought would be most willing to preserve a kind remembrance of him, and to be pleased with this, perhaps last mark of his regard for them.

The reader will readily perceive, that the object of most of them, is to enforce the great practical principles of christianity, to state the true extent of christian duty, and to prescribe the means of attaining to christian perfection.

If, in treating on subjects so closely united, the same sentiments, and of course a sameness or similarity of expression too frequently

frequently occur, it is hoped that their importance to the cause of religious truths, and to the right government of the mind, will be admitted as some excuse for it.

N. B. The learned and worthy author of these sermons did not live to see the printing of them completed, or even to mark out more than the first thirteen for publication. But, in pursuance of his wishes, a selection has been made of the following five Discourses, chiefly on practical subjects, as being of most general use, and most conducive to the great end of all his labours, that of promoting true and rational piety.

Feb. 1. 1790.

C O N T E N T S.

S E R M O N I.

On the Attainment of eternal Life.

MARK X. 17. *Good Master, what shall I do
that I may inherit eternal Life?* Page I

S E R M O N II.

On keeping the Commandments.

MATTHEW XIX. 17. *If thou wilt enter into
Life, keep the Commandments.* 19

S E R M O N III.

On Examination of a right Faith in Christ.

2 COR. xiii. 5. *Examine yourselves whether
ye are in the Faith.* 43

S E R M O N IV.

On the sublime motives and principles of
Christianity.

ACTS XX. 24. *Neither count I my Life dear
unto myself, so that I might finish my
Course with Joy.* 63

S E R M O N

S E R M O N V.

On Diligence in our religious Duties.

ROMANS xii. 11. *Not slothful in Business,
fervent in Spirit, serving the Lord.* 83

S E R M O N VI.

On Diligence in our religious Duties.

ROMANS xii. 11. *Not slothful in Business,
fervent in Spirit, serving the Lord.* 103

S E R M O N VII.

On Preparation for Death.

2 KINGS xx. 1. *Set thine House in order,
for thou shalt die and not live.* 125

S E R M O N VIII.

On Christian Satisfaction. *Sanctification.*

1 THESSALONIANS v. 23. *The very God
of Peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray
God your whole Spirit, and Soul, and
Body, be preserved blameless unto the com-
ing of our Lord Jesus Christ.* 147

S E R M O N IX.

On Christian Charity.

1 CORINTHIANS xiii. 4. *Charity suffereth
long, and is kind.* 171

S E R M O N

C O N T E N T S. vii

S E R M O N X.

On the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

LUKE xxii. 19. *This do in remembrance of
me.* 191

S E R M O N XI.

The same Subject continued. 219

S E R M O N XII.

The same Subject continued. 237

S E R M O N XIII.

The same Subject continued. 259

S E R M O N XIV.

On Christian Consolation.

JOHN xvi. 7. *It is expedient for you that I
go away, for if I go not away, the Com-
forter will not come unto you.* 277

S E R M O N XV.

On the tendency of Piety to promote
Happiness.

I PETER iii. 13, 14. *And who is he that
will harm you, if ye be followers of that
which is good? But and if ye suffer for
righteousness sake, happy are ye.* 299

S E R M O N

SERMON XVI.

On Consideration.

HAGGAI i. 5. *Now therefore thus saith
the Lord of Hosts, Consider your ways.* 319

SERMON XVII.

The same Subject continued. 339

SERMON XVIII.

On the due regulation of Anger.

EPHES. iv. 26. *Be ye angry and sin not.* 353

SERMON

S E R M O N I.

MARK X. 17.

*Good Master, what shall I do that I may
inherit eternal life?*

AMONG the several inquiries which interest the human mind, there are some of universal importance; in which our whole kind, and every individual is alike concerned. Such are those respecting the nature, end, and destination of man: in what his happiness consists, and how it is to be procured—who gave us our being, and in what that being consists—whether it be to end with this short life, or whether, when our bodies are resolved into dust, our souls shall still survive, and have any part in the eternity to come—whether we are left here to follow our own imaginations, or are accountable for our behaviour to that power which gave

B

us

us our being, and will reward or punish us according to our deserts.

To these great points, which concern, as I said, every man that is born into the world, one might expect an universal attention; and that all should be solicitous and earnest to know the truth in these great articles, and to form their whole conduct by them. But when we look into the world about us, we see little of these appearances; and find men, for the greater part, far more engaged, if not wholly occupied, in pursuits of a different kind. If peradventure they have heard with their ears, or been taught in their infancy, the answers which religion makes to these inquiries; these have left little impression behind them, have gained no settled place in their thoughts; and of consequence their lives and actions are little influenced by them. So it certainly is, that many who profess to believe these truths, are little the better for this belief.

To call up your attention then to the question in the text, to awaken a sense of the moment and importance of it,

it, is my present design from the words before us. And the best way to do this will, I think, be to present it naked, in all its plainness and simplicity before you.

The great truths of religion have a dignity and splendour in them, to which nothing can be added by argument or eloquence. They require only our attention. We have only to open our eyes to see, and our hearts to feel, and they carry a lustre and conviction that is irresistible along with them.

To see the importance of the inquiry before us, we need only consider the import of the terms themselves, and the nature and evidence of those first truths that are supposed and implied in it: which lead directly to this inquiry, and are the grounds and reasons upon which it is founded.

That there is an eternity to come; that it is not possible in the nature of things for time itself ever to have an end, is what you will easily represent to your own thoughts. If you suppose

millions of ages to run out, you will not come to the end of time: you may still count on millions more without end. You cannot even in thought or imagination set bounds to it. Now this discernment itself, the power of seeing this great truth in so clear a light, is some sort of presumption that we are formed for eternity. It seems not probable that God would place this great object so strongly in view before us only to engage our curiosity; or unless we had ourselves some interest in it. But of this we have farther very strong intimations from conscience, and the natural apprehensions of men about futurity and a judgment to come. We find in ourselves a sense of good and evil, the fullest sense and conviction that we deserve praise and reward for the one, and blame and punishment for the other.

Our hopes and fears run before us into the other world. We cannot bound our desires and wishes within the narrow circuit of this life: nor can the guilty sinner, in the most prosperous circumstances, shake off the horrors of the next. These presages of futurity have
led

led men in all ages to believe a future state, and surely with reason: for can we suppose them implanted in us for nothing? Can we believe that conscience was given us to impress the mind with fear and terror, where no fear is? Is there any other passion or affection which thus deceives us; which is given us in vain, and which has not its proper use and object?

This argument from the nature of man, will appear yet stronger from the nature of God. If there be a God, he must be a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. But do we see virtue rewarded in this life? Do not vice and wickedness often triumph over it? It is therefore a clear deduction from reason, that there must be a state after this, in which that virtue, which is tried and proved by sufferings here, shall be rewarded; and prosperous vice be punished.

But this truth is in the gospel laid open and naked to our view. Life and immortality are there clearly brought to light. We are plainly assured that God hath appointed a day in which he will

judge the world in righteousness, and render to every man according to his works. The wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.

Thus are the previous truths which lead to this inquiry, supported by the first principles of natural and revealed religion; as well as attested by the voice of conscience, and the general consent of all ages and nations of the world.

If this then be the truth; if God hath created man immortal, and made him an image of his own eternity; if all who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, shall inherit eternal life; if indignation and wrath are threatened hereafter to those who obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness; tribulation and anguish to every soul of man that doeth evil: what more can be said to quicken your attention to the inquiry in the text? If good and evil, if life and death eternal are set before you, what can I say to determine your choice? Shall I try to convince you that eternal

nal life and happiness are worth inquiring after: that this life is but for a moment; that it passeth away as a shadow, and bears no proportion to eternity; that we shall be infinite losers if we gain every thing in this world, and forfeit our hopes and lose our souls for ever — that the greatest afflictions, which endure for a moment, are but light when compared with an eternal weight of glory? Would it not be affronting to the meanest understanding, to suppose it capable of doubting in a case so clear and evident?

Either prove to yourselves that there is indeed nothing beyond the present life; that you are no better than the beasts that perish; satisfy yourselves that the fears of conscience are vain and chimerical; that all futurity in another state, is a mere dream and illusion; that the sense of mankind in this great article is nonsense and folly; or else acknowledge that the inquiry in the text is the most important, is, in comparison, the only important question that can come before you. If the doctrine of a life after this be true; this is certainly

the greatest truth in the world. It is this truth which should govern our opinions, sentiments, and judgments of every thing else. And if men are careless and indifferent about their actions, and the consequences attending them, it must be because they have never considered this truth as they ought: have never given it that entertainment in the mind which its supreme importance deserves. And this is certainly the case of the generality of those who call themselves christians.

To inquire into the reasons of this strange infatuation, would lead us into too large a field at present. There is a fool-hardiness in some, proceeding from mere animal strength and a luxuriance of spirits, who seem to pride themselves in this levity of temper; as if it implied fear and cowardice to have any concern for another world, or were a condescension below them to inquire into, or join in the same opinions with the vulgar. These we will grant may, some few of them, have discernment enough to perceive a degree of weakness and credulity in many of those who profess religion;

ligion; their devotion often tinged with enthusiasm, or corrupted by superstition. But does it follow, that because some are guilty of weakness and error in the worship of God, there is therefore no God, or no worship to be paid to him? If men place too much of their religion in form, or ceremony, or opinion, must we therefore give up the weightier matters of the law? Is there therefore no righteousness, mercy, or truth? Is there therefore no religion at all; no future state, or a judgment to come? Now this is all that I am at present challenging your attention to. Admit but these great articles of religion, and allow them their proper weight and force; and then pursue your inquiries where reason and conscience direct you. If you can find any religion more likely to recommend you to the favour of God than the christian, be that your religion. But if you can find none more pure in its morals, more rational in its doctrines and worship, adhere to the christian: but adhere to it in earnest, and regard its doctrines and laws as the words of eternal life. At least do not pass thro' life without thought or re-

reflection, till you have convinced yourselves that there is nothing worth thinking or reflecting about. But neither is this the question, whether there be any thing worth thinking about; but whether there is not every thing that can deserve your attention: whether there is not an object before you, the greatest that can possibly be thought of, or conceived.

Another cause of this supine inattention which I am complaining of, and which cannot too often be laid before you, is the power which present and temporal things have of engrossing our attention, and excluding all other objects from our thoughts.

The things that are temporal are seen; are objected to our senses, and force our attention; while the things that are eternal are remote in expectation, unknown to our senses, not to be painted out, or made an object by the imagination; and are therefore unapt to move or engage the affections, and to set the active powers of the mind in motion. Hence, as I said, we see the
world

world about us taken up with the present scene, busy and careful about many things, but in seeming ignorance or forgetfulness of any better part, of any thing beyond the present life. And even those who are more sober-minded, and act under a serious sense and conviction of these truths, who are, I yet hope, no small party among us, seem often afraid of avowing this openly; keep their good sentiments to themselves and their closets; and shew little warmth or zeal in the cause of religion, lest they should be thought to offend against the fashion and forms of the world. The advocate for virtue will talk freely of the interests of society, of honour and honesty, and the publick good: but as to his interests in another life, or his regard for the favour of God, he keeps them for the most part out of sight; and talks of them, if at all, with scruple and reserve. Strange, to be sure, and absurd, that men should be ashamed to own their hopes of immortality; or think the character of a christian, which implies in it every thing that is amiable and benevolent, every thing that is truly great and good, a term of reproach, rather

ther than of honour and esteem. But if this be the case, if this weakness of mind be so generally prevalent, it behoves us to be upon our guard, where we are so much exposed to danger. We must be ever awake to the calls of reason and conscience, and suffer no rival power to usurp their rights, or to claim the dominion over us. We must habituate ourselves to pay an unreserved submission to their authority, neither courting the applause, nor fearing the reproach, of men. It is surely incumbent upon all to think for themselves, where they are themselves the parties; and especially to weigh well those hopes and fears, which have for their object another world, and which propose to us an interest in eternity itself. We must open our faith to the evidence of things not seen: remembering that reality and existence depend not on the distance of time or place—that what is future will have its accomplishment, and will as certainly be one day present, as the present was once future—that truth will be ever the same, whether we attend to it or not;
and

and eternity remain what it is, however we may banish it from our thoughts.

Let us, then, bear ever in mind, that this eternity is before us — that whatever our lot may be in it, time is now bringing it forward, and will soon consign us over to it for ever. How solicitous then should we be, with fear and trembling to work out this great salvation, and to leave nothing undone by which we may attain eternal life!

Another reason of this thoughtless security and indifference to the objects we are speaking of, and which has, I am persuaded, a more general effect upon christians than any of the former, is the present disinclination they are apt to feel to these researches into things that seem obscure and at a distance, and which may be contemplated at another time; while they are solicited by other cares and pleasures, which perpetually surround them. It is not the present business of the day. Some party of pleasure is to be joined, some dissipation invites to fill up the vacant hour; or perhaps it is irksome, as I said, to
think

think about them at present, and we will do it at another season. But how strange an account will this be to give to God, if you are to be judged hereafter, or to your own consciences now; that you could find no time to think on the great points for which the powers of reason and thought were given you,—that you could not attend to the business of life, the very end for which you were born, and for which you live, because of the cares and pleasures which continually employed and amused you!

But what is there that can hinder us from employing our thoughts some minutes in every day on these interesting subjects? Your prayers and devotions, if you lift up your thoughts to God, and have your heart and attention engaged in them, will necessarily bring them every day before you. It is, however, the very business of every seventh day: the very reason on God's part, and the only means on yours, of hallowing this day. Can you then find any excuse for not turning your thoughts on this day to the subjects I am recommending—

commending to you? Can you find a nobler theme, a nobler field of contemplation, to employ those hours which the laws of God and your country have consecrated to this purpose?

I am indeed aware that many good men, I mean moderately good men, begin to relax in their opinions about the duties of this day. The time is advancing when we shall have fashion, and perhaps the example of moderately good men, pleaded in favour of such customs as have been usually thought irreligious, and a profanation of this holy day. Cards and innocent amusements, we shall be told, are as innocent on a day of rest, as on any other: and without something to fill up the time, the sabbath — what a weariness is it? But granting these amusements to be never so innocent in themselves, you are, I am sure, sensible, in the light we are considering them, of the danger and evil of indulging in them; and will therefore, I hope, be prepared with firmness and zeal, to oppose every attempt towards such innovations; as well as to lead others by your example,

ple, to the proper uses and exercises of the day.

I shall not at present remark on the great waste of time on other days so frequently allowed to these diversions; nor inquire how many domestic duties, besides those of prudence and œconomy, are often sacrificed to them. But when we have convinced ourselves that we have indeed immortal spirits within us, we shall perhaps think it right to consider, whether so large a proportion of this time as is sometimes allotted to them, may not be more worthily employed in improving the mind in useful knowledge, or habits of industry and virtue, than in amusements by which nothing can possibly be gained to the mind, and by some of which much may be lost; if unhappily it be susceptible of the passions of avarice, fretfulness, or envy, which, by being frequently excited, will not fail to become habitual.

I would not be thought to judge with too much severity of these subjects, or to make religion appear an enemy, which it surely is not, to the innocent
and

and rational pleasures of life. But however, let those, who can spare so much time from the duties of life to these avocations, be sure to employ the rest of it in the best manner; and especially to improve that time which is dedicated to pious uses, to the purposes for which it was designed. And for those, who cannot by reading or the strength of their own minds, carry their thoughts and inquiries far into these subjects, let them attend with the more care and diligence, the publick instruction of the church: let them treasure up in their minds, and frequently reflect on the doctrines they learn there: not as matters of speculation and opinion only; but as rules of life and practice, to compare their past, and form their future conduct by. So will the lessons they hear there, if received with an honest and good heart, however mixed with weakness and much infirmity on the part of the teacher, be sufficient and able to make them wise unto salvation. Lastly, to all let me apply myself, and what has been said, in the words of Moses to the children of Israel. Set your hearts unto all the words which I

testify among you this day: for it is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life. The issues of eternity depend upon it: the great alternative of everlasting life, or death eternal.

S E R M O N II.

MATTHEW XIX. 17.

If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

THE question to which these memorable words of our Saviour are an answer, was that of the young man, What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life:—a question which requires our whole attention: not so much for the difficulty of resolving it, as for its great weight and importance; for the sense we ought to have, and the strong conviction upon our minds, that in this one point all our hopes and fortunes, all our interests, present and eternal, are involved.

When this great, this plain, and most certain truth, is deeply impressed on the mind, attention to every thing

else that respects our duty and happiness will be secured. When we have a full persuasion that eternal life is before us, that the design of God in our creation and redemption, was to bring many sons unto glory; to build up, as the scriptures represent it, out of his rational creation, the subjects of his boundless kingdom, an eternal temple for an habitation unto himself—when we are possessed and filled with the idea, which this great object presents to the mind, and ask, with the young man in the scripture before us, What shall I do to inherit eternal life; how shall I aspire to this honour, glory, and immortality; to be indeed a pillar in, or at least not an outcast from, the temple of my God? It requires no great attention, no exertion of the understanding, to answer this momentous question. The answer, which reason, which the plainest reason, as well as revelation, will give us, is that in the text: If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. If the gift of God be eternal life, if this be the prize held out by infinite goodness, it must be for the good; it must be the reward of the righteous,

 that

that is, for those who conform to the will and commandments of God.

This then is the voice of reason and nature: if thou wilt enter into life, make thyself worthy; make thyself holy, righteous, just, and good. If you will obtain favour with God, do what he commands; consult his law written in your heart; attend to the voice of conscience accusing, or else excusing and approving your different actions, sentiments, and conduct.

But this doctrine is in the scriptures set forth and impressed upon us with much greater light and force. The purity of the divine nature in loving righteousness and hating iniquity, is represented in the highest perfection; his will and commandments as requiring truth in the inward parts; and the means of grace are appointed, by which we may be sanctified wholly, in our whole spirit, soul and body.

The person to whom our Lord addressed the words of the text was a Jew, a disciple of Moses: who had the scrip-

tures of the old testament in his hands, and seems to have been well instructed in them. But convinced, as we may suppose, of the divine authority of our Saviour, he seems to be here offering himself for his disciple: and therefore inquires what the duties of his religion are; upon what terms he may hope to be saved by it. Our blessed Lord therefore refers him to the moral precepts of the law, as the rule of his future, as well as his past conduct: plainly intimating that this is the ultimate intention and meaning of the christian, as well as the Jewish religion: agreeably to the declaration of Solomon, Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man.

The decalogue, or ten commandments, to which our Lord directs the obedience of his young disciple, was intended and always understood as a summary, or short abridgment of the moral duties owing to God and man. And our Saviour reduces them to a yet smaller compass, when he was asked what was the chief commandment of the law: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with

with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets: that is, these are the principles which lead to all righteousness; which comprehend in their full extent every duty and every virtue; and which, if they govern as they ought, all our thoughts, words, and actions, will lead us to fulfil the whole law.

Beside these, there were many other duties of divine obligation laid upon the Jews, their sacrifices, offerings, and oblations, with the other rites and ceremonies of their religious worship: which seem designed to exercise their piety, or as perpetual admonitions of the homage they owed to God. In their obedience to these, which laid no restraint upon their appetites and passions, they were in general punctual and exemplary: and often placed so much virtue and merit in these observances, as to think them a sufficient title to the character of righteous, even when they were guilty

of violating the moral duties and the commandments themselves.

This absurd opinion our Saviour, as the prophets had frequently done before, takes every occasion among his hearers, to reprove. Now do ye hypocrites make clean the outside of the cup, while your inward parts are full of wickedness; ye pay tithe of mint, anise, and cummin, but neglect the weightier matters of the law, mercy, justice and truth: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. These then, the moral duties prescribed in the commandments, the virtues of the heart and mind, are the primary duties; of the greatest weight and moment in the law. And the rest are in themselves of little value, any farther than they are instrumental and subsidiary to these. The ceremonial or ritual part of the law our Saviour came to abolish: but concerning these weightier matters of it, Think ye, says he, that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets? I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. These he came to enforce with all the sanction

sanction and authority he could give them.

What then must we think of those amongst us who affect to decry morality; who speak of good works (in a language not easily understood) as legal and carnal; and set up faith, or grace, a sense and feeling of the new birth, or some mystick operation of the spirit, in opposition to these, and as the only tokens of true religion? Who tell us, that to preach up virtue, is preaching another gospel: and that to disclaim all moral power in ourselves, is the first step in religion, and in the way to eternal life? Certainly we may affirm of all such, however pious and devout in their sentiments, that they know neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm. For what virtue is there, properly so called; what is there good and laudable in the most perfect character, but moral virtue? And what is this but another name for righteousness, holiness, and godliness? What is it to be holy in all manner of conversation and godliness, but to be virtuous in all manner of conversation? What are the graces of the spirit, love, joy,

joy or a chearful trust in providence, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance, what are these but moral virtues? What did our Saviour Christ come into the world for, but to redeem us from all iniquity; that is, from all manner of vice; and to purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works: to teach us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this world? But this denying ourselves all sinful gratifications, this righteousness, sobriety and godliness, are all of them moral virtues. What did he preach through his whole excellent sermon upon the mount, but poverty or humility of spirit, meekness, purity of heart, peacefulness, temperance, mercy, fortitude, magnanimity, and disinterestedness of mind? Why does the apostle call upon us to add to our faith virtue, and tell us, that if we had all faith, so that we could remove mountains, and have not the virtue of charity, it will profit us nothing? What is there indeed in faith but the virtue that is in it, which can recommend us to God? As much as there is of piety, humility,

humility, resignation to the will, and trust in the goodness and truth of God; so much is there in our faith that is pleasing and acceptable to him. But these are all of them the virtues of Morality. In a word, every christian grace is a moral virtue, and the ultimate design and object of all the doctrines, motives, institutions, and precepts of religion, is to make us virtuous; to make us good men; good neighbours, good citizens; to make us perfect and thoroughly furnished unto all good works; or, to keep to the language of the text, to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

It is of great use in every subject of doubt or question, to understand clearly and distinctly the terms, or language in which we express ourselves; a want of which is the principal cause of involuntary error, and of most of the disputes which have arisen among men. What has been said may therefore have answered in great part the end I proposed in this discourse; which was to shew what is meant by keeping the commandments.

And

And this, as I said, is a matter that requires no great attention or penetration of mind. As God has given his commandments for the use and observance of all, he must have made the knowledge of them level and easy to all. If we consult our reason and conscience, we shall find the great lines of our duty to God and man written in our hearts, in characters sufficiently intelligible. In the scriptures the rule of our duty in all its branches is so clearly laid down, that he may run who readeth them. In fact whatever there is hard to be understood in them, whatever differences may have arisen about matters of speculation and curiosity, however christians may have divided from each other about points of doctrine or modes of worship; in the more essential duties of christianity all are agreed. What is meant by righteousness, temperance, piety, and charity, has never yet been disputed.

To proceed then in this plain inquiry, whatever is enjoined by our Saviour Christ and his apostles, is to be reckoned a christian duty. The new testa-

testament is at large our table of commandments. Of these, I scarce need to observe that, the decalogue or ten commandments, are a very imperfect summary; pointing only, like the compass, like a few rays from the centre to the cardinal points of practice; but intended in their use and application, to take in the whole circle of duty. We learn from this short abridgment itself, that our words and our thoughts are to be submitted to the laws of God, as well as our actions; and must understand their contents in the same latitude and extent, in which they are explained in the old and new testament. Our blessed Lord hath taught us, that the lowest degrees of intemperance and impurity are within the prohibition, Thou shalt not commit adultery: and his apostle St. James, that who so hateth his brother, is a murderer; is guilty of a breach of the sixth commandment. In a word, all that becometh saints, all that belongs to holiness, all the branches of piety, charity, and purity, are in their highest degree implied in the duties of a christian life. And under the first of these heads, the observance of all the institu-

institutions of religion, its sacraments as well as its sabbaths, is certainly to be ranked among the commandments of Christ.

But if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. We may know our master's will and do it not. If we know the conditions of eternal life, we are yet to inquire when we may be truly said to perform them: for in this point it is that we are most liable to be deceived. When men lead inoffensive lives, and free from open scandal; if they have a few fancied virtues to rely upon; if they feel at times either ardour in their devotions, or benevolence in their hearts; if they have convinced themselves of the necessity of obedience, and given the consent of their minds to the doctrines and duties of religion: they are apt to think themselves proficient in virtue, and that they have purchased to themselves a good degree of confidence towards God.

Be it observed then, in the first place, that to keep within the prohibition of the commandments, to abstain from the actual commission of sin, is a very defective

fective character, if we are not also fruitful in every good work. Cease to do evil, saith the prophet, and, he adds also, learn to do well. A mere negative righteousness will never justify us in the sight of God. To keep the commandments implies, as we have seen, that we form in ourselves all the habits of piety and virtue, and that we use all the means which religion, or our own observation has taught us to be useful to this end. To know whether our obedience be sincere, we must inquire to what purpose have we lived; what good have we done thro' the course of our lives: a question which I fear would put many of us into some confusion. Have we sought out, or embraced when offered, the opportunities of doing good, and of being useful in the world? How much of our time and pains have we given to the reforming our lives, and the improvement of our virtue? What rules have we laid out and observed for the government of our minds; for the correcting our temper, our passions, and inclinations? What good habits have we formed, what bad ones reduced and conquered? If we have set out well, we must
still

still endeavour after the things that are more excellent; we must be ever abounding in the work of the Lord, and pray and endeavour to abound yet more and more. We must be diligent, that we may be found at last without spot and blameless; that we may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

And therefore, secondly, our obedience must farther be uniform and universal. Our obedience in one instance, will not compensate for the want of it in another. The warmest zeal or transport of piety, will not excuse the want of charity. The most fervent charity will not authorise a life of intemperance and sensuality. True virtue is an habitual, ruling principle, influencing all our actions, and exerting itself steadily in all occurrences of life, and never can have its perfect work till it has rooted itself in the heart, and brought every thought into captivity to the will of God. But it is impossible that the heart should be engaged in the service of God, if we allow ourselves in the violation of any one of his commandments. If we wilfully and deliberately offend in one point of the law, it cannot

not be from a principle of obedience that we keep the rest. And without this principle we cannot surely be said to obey, or, in a religious and moral sense, to keep them at all.

And this leads me to observe, lastly, that to keep the commandments, implies in the strictest and truest sense a determination of the mind; the conformity of the will and affections, to the will and law of God: of which our good works, tho' a necessary and a probable, are not always a certain and infallible proof. How many are placed in such circumstances as to be under no temptation to violate the laws of truth and justice? How many reasons of prudence and self-consideration, without the least regard to duty, may keep men within the bounds of temperance and sobriety? How many may give largely of their abundance to the poor, when yet their superfluity is such, that it is a sacrifice which costs them nothing? How much has nature done to make us merciful, benevolent, and compassionate? How many may appear liberal from ostentation, a regard to decency and character, with-

D

out

out any real charity in their hearts? The apostle supposes that a man may give all his goods to feed the poor, and not have charity: and pronounces that where this is the case it profiteth nothing. To obey the commandments of God we must do it from a principle of obedience, from a sense of duty: without which our seeming best actions, will be nothing worth.

The young man with whom our Saviour was here conversing, could readily answer, that he had kept all the commandments from his youth up; and that, as we may presume, from motives not destitute of piety and religion: for Jesus looking on him loved him. But when he advanced farther, what lack I yet? Our Lord was forced to reprove his forwardness, and self-opinion: telling him, If thou wilt be perfect, sell all that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come follow me: in answer to which we are told, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. At the first preaching the gospel, parting with their possessions, and forsaking all that they had,

had, was the hard condition required of many to fit them for the kingdom of Christ. And if all were not called to this severe trial, it was certainly the duty of all to be prepared for it. This our blessed Lord frequently taught his followers, he that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; cannot be my disciple. This then was the thing lacking in the young man before us: he loved little. He loved virtue and goodness, but loved his possessions more. He wanted still the principle of obedience; the principle of an intire unreserved obedience to the will of God. This principle was not rooted and grounded in him.

But this principle is necessary to give a value to our best actions; to consecrate even our virtues; and to make them acceptable to God. There is a reason why temperance, the same reason why justice, why mercy, patience, meekness and charity, are good and commendable: and this reason is, that they are conformable to the divine will, to the supreme, unerring reason, to moral order and eternal truth: all which ex-

pressions have the same meaning and import. This conformity then to the divine will, is the great fundamental virtue, from which every other derives its name and character. As much as there is of this in our liberality, sobriety, chastity; in our loving one another, forbearing and forgiving one another, in our abstinence from pleasure, in our patience under wrongs and under adversity, so much is there of duty paid; so much, and only so much, is there of virtue and goodness in them.

But how then is this? Have actions no character of their own? Must we look up for all the good and the bad that is in them to the disposition and mind of the agent? Must the actions of men take their character from the men, instead of men deriving their character from their actions? I answer, that this is certainly so. To God who searcheth the heart, the hidden man of the heart stands characterized by the good or evil that prevails there. He saw, with pity, what appeared malice and cruelty in Saul, when he was a persecutor and injurious: and received him to mercy, because

cause he did it ignorantly and in unbelief. He did it from a mistaken, ill directed zeal, thinking he did God service when he was persecuting the church. These worst of crimes admitted of extenuation, and lost much of their nature, when they proceeded in the greater part from the principle of virtue.

The same apostle has expressly taught us, that the most indifferent actions may take a moral character, and become good or bad from the moving principle in the agent. In the dispute which arose among the first christians, whether they were still obliged to observe the distinction made by the law of Moses, betwixt clean and unclean meats, tho' he knew and was persuaded of the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean of itself, yet because there were some that were weak in the faith, that is, whose consciences were weak and scrupulous, who could scarce bring themselves to believe that this distinction was abolished; these he thought in conscience and duty obliged to observe it. *To him that

D 3

thinketh

* Rom. xiv. 14.

thinketh any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean. ^b He that doubteth is guilty, or condemned, if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: he eateth contrary to his own belief and persuasion. For whatsoever is not of faith is sin. That is, whatsoever a man does, however innocent in itself it really be, contrary to his own faith or belief, contrary to the convictions of his reason and conscience, is sin. A truth so evident that it wants no proof. For he who violates his conscience in any instance, acts contrary to the only principle which can secure his virtue in any other.

The result then is, that our actions are not a certain measure of the good or evil that is in us. They are but presumptive evidences of our real character. Our good works are certainly the only proof we can give to the world, and perhaps the best evidence of virtue even to ourselves; and therefore when men appear by their actions to be virtuous, honest and good; when they give all the tokens of virtue that can be given, we ought to revere the character: it is
not

^b Rom. xiv. 23.

not charitable, it is but reasonable and just, to believe that they are so. Hence in the language of men, it must be he that doeth righteousness is righteous. And to this language the scriptures themselves agree, when they tell us that every man shall receive according as he hath done in the body: and they that have done good shall go into everlasting life. But in estimating this good in our actions, the principle from which they flow will certainly be considered. They as plainly teach us that we may profess and think ourselves true christians, and address our Saviour with the appellation, 'Lord, Lord, without any real virtue or religion in our hearts: and may do many wonderful works in his name, and yet not do the will of our father who is in heaven. On the other hand, the man whose heart standeth right; who has a sense of his duty habitually present in his mind; tho' he has not given many shining proofs of his virtue to the world; tho' it has not been tried in the furnace of adversity; yet having a steady faith and allegiance to heaven rooted in him; being superior

D 4

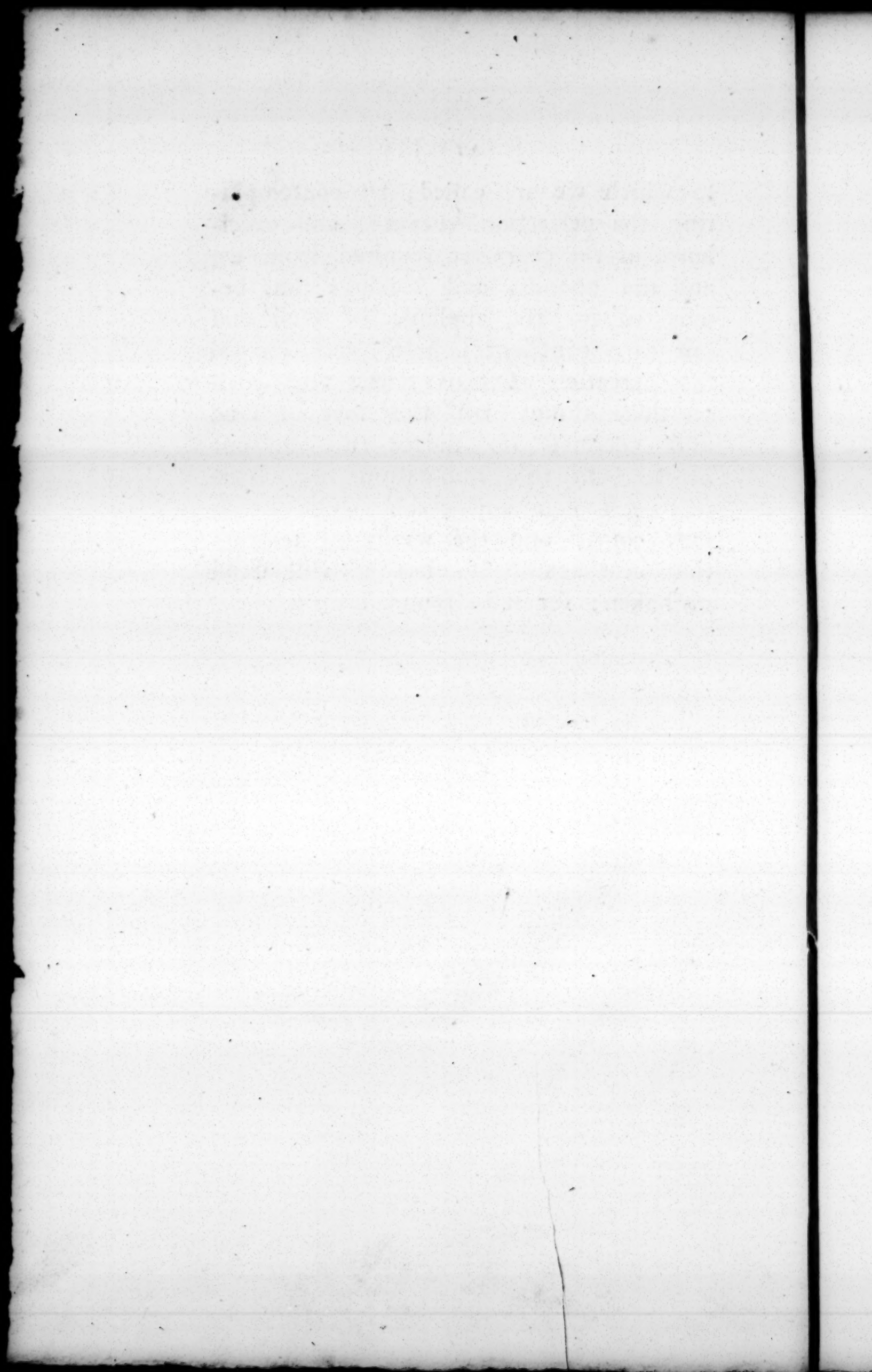
to

to all temptation; he has in effect obtained the victory: will be crowned with all the honours and rewards of that victory which overcometh the world.

Let us therefore, as many as would be perfect, be thus minded. Let us examine ourselves whether we are in the faith; whether we have that faith or fidelity to heaven, which overcometh the world. Let us look over our past actions, and inquire what sacrifice we have made in them to our duty; what temptations we have resisted; and what assurance we can collect from these that our virtue will stand every farther trial: remembering, that if we would be able to stand in the judgment, we must approve ourselves in his sight, who trieth the very hearts and reins: and that nothing less than the devotement of our whole heart and mind, a total resignation of our will and affections to the law of God, will be accepted as obedience to his commandments.

Let us endeavour to cultivate this principle in ourselves, by reflecting how noble as well as rational a service it is
to

to which we are called; by contemplating the perfection, beauty, and excellence of the character required from us, and the honours and blessings that belong to it; the applause of God and our own consciences here, and eternal life hereafter. Let us reflect and dwell on these things, till the love of God and goodness do indeed rule in our hearts. On this foundation our virtue will rest firm and stable. The floods may come, and the winds of temptation beat against it; but it will stand unshaken: for it is founded on a rock.



S E R M O N I I I .

2 COR. xiii. 5.

*Examine yourselves whether ye are in the
Faith.*

I N stating the advantages of the christian revelation above those of natural religion, we usually insist, and justly, upon the purity and perfection of its precepts, and on the superior force of those motives by which it engages and enforces our obedience; from both which, taken together, we might expect the most exemplary purity and sanctity of manners to be the prevailing character among christians. But when we look out for this happy effect we are apt to be filled with wonder and disappointment; and are at a loss to conceive how the lives of christians can be so little answerable to their professions. For in what are they generally better, or what
do

do they more than others? Are not the lives of christians a mixture of good and evil like those of other men? Does not the latter generally prevail? Is there not as much impiety, lewdness, riot, and excess of every kind; does not the same love of the world, of its honours, pleasures, and riches, as much rule in the hearts of men, and produce the same overflowings of ungodliness, the same rapine, violence, fraud, and treachery, as was seen in the world before christianity had a beginning?

This reproach which is brought upon religion by its pretended friends, we are sure to meet with in the mouth of its enemies; who have with art and malice improved it even into an argument against its truth.

It is obvious to observe, that they who make this objection, are usually in the number of those who minister the most occasion for it. And we may with confidence assert, that the best and most virtuous amongst us, if there are any that excel in virtue, that have kept themselves unspotted from the world, and
have

have served the Lord with a perfect heart, will thankfully ascribe the good whereunto they have already attained, and rest the hopes of persevering, and reaching at last the high prize of their calling, to the grace of God, in the lights, assistances, and motives of the gospel.

But the fact itself, as it is here stated, we may hope, is quite otherwise. It is certain that as a rule of life, nothing from heaven can come more perfect, more worthy of God and man, than the christian institution. And it is plainly impossible that men, who always act from some motive or other, can in any degree believe the obligations of duty, with the promises and terrors annexed to it, without being in some degree the better for it. In fact when this faith was first offered to the world, when the truths of religion were believed upon examination and conviction, its influence was generally seen and acknowledged.

The first christian apologists insist openly and in the face of the world on this fact: that when men became converts to
the

the religion of Christ, their manners, tempers, and dispositions, were changed and reformed; they were, as it were, born again; and became new creatures. And for this we have the authority of enemies as well as friends. One of the most respectable characters among the heathen writers, whose office led him to inquire into their behaviour, reports to the emperor who was then their persecutor, that he found nothing observable among the christians, but their singular charity, piety, and innocence of life. Another, who valued himself upon his proficiency in philosophy and his hatred of christianity, and who was himself invested with the imperial authority, commends their piety to God, and benevolence to men, to the imitation of those of his own religion; and thought it the best way to keep down the rising credit of christianity to adopt the customs and rival the charity of christians, by erecting hospitals, schools, and beneficent foundations, of which they had given the first example to the world. And tho' the influence of our holy religion may have visibly decreased in the later ages, yet surely there are numerous and shining instances

instances in our own times, of the same piety, charity, temperance, meekness, and every other virtue for which the gospel was at first distinguished.

If then our christian faith have lost its influence, may it not be doubted whether this faith is to be every where found where it is pretended or professed? If it produce not the same effects which it did in the first christian worthies, is it, are we sure, the same faith in kind and degree which theirs was? May it not be doubted whether the faith of many in the gospel truths be any thing more than a negative suspended assent, inclining to neither, but halting between two opinions; whether it be not a superficial, transient, principle, floating only on the surface, and that has never taken possession of the mind; or whether it be not directed to objects of little importance in the religious life, in neglect of the weightier truths of the gospel. For true christian faith is an active principle that delights in exerting itself, that is always victorious, and overcometh the world.

Of

Of this faith then if we see little effects, it is perhaps because we see few instances of it. With many christians the faith which they profess, is certainly a mere self delusion, a false persuasion that they believe the truths of the gospel, when they have scarce informed themselves what these truths are: and much less have inquired upon what grounds they are to be believed. At best it is here a thoughtless, unmeaning assent, which as it comes not from the heart, can never influence the heart; or produce any fruit in their lives and conversations. These are christians merely because they were not born in pagan countries. And may they not still be said to be almost heathens in a christian country, when they are often strangers to the worship, and have need yet to be taught what are the first principles of the oracles of God?

But secondly, among those who are better taught, and even those who pretend to teach others, how many are there who point their own and the faith of others to objects which serve rather

tuous

tuous life, and are made to terminate wholly in speculation and refinement.

Often have these speculations led to errors in practice; and a difference in opinion only, destroyed that charity, that love of man, which, united with the love of God, is the very soul and spirit of the christian life. Often is this charity, which we are commanded to extend to our enemies and persecutors, denied, and all the hopes of salvation along with it, to all but those of the same communion and faith with ourselves; while we liberally grant to these, every thing that is promised, and much more than is without other conditions promised, in the gospel. What think ye of unconditional election, irresistible grace and finished salvation, as it is called, claimed and assumed on the one hand; and absolute universal reprobation, or endless perdition announced as the alternative already decreed, on the other?

Yet these are doctrines, which, tho' they unchristian almost the whole christian world, and leave them without hope under the curse of God, are believed by many

many sincerely pious, and I therefore hope sincerely good men: who are not aware of the dangerous uses to which the wicked may pervert them, by flattering themselves and others that they are in a state of salvation when guilty of the grossest sins; or that they are inconsistent with the christian doctrine of repentance; and reduce all the motives of religion, the exhortations, promises, and threatenings of the gospel; if not the use and meaning of a future judgment, to nothing.

Thus our belief and practice are set at variance with each other. Our faith is divided against itself; and our belief in some speculative doctrines, subverts in its tendency and consequences all the principles of practical religion.

Let us then consider in the third place, what are the doctrines which we are most concerned to know and believe; and what it is to believe them aright.

* "The secret things, saith the scripture, belong unto the Lord our God." The ways and dispensations of providence are

E 2

locked

* Deut. xxix. 29.

locked up from our view in the secret councils of heaven. " But the things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children for ever, that we should do all the works of this law." That is, the things which we are concerned to know, are the things which are clearly revealed. And the ends or reasons for which they are revealed, and those for which we are required to believe them, are the same; namely, that they may influence our practice; that we may be induced to do all the works of the law; that we may be led to attend to, and practise the duties of religion.

Now the things which we are most concerned to know, are certainly the end and destination of man; that life and immortality, which it was one great end of our Saviour's coming into the world to bring to light by his gospel; together with the duties and means by which to prepare and fit ourselves for this life and immortality. These, as they are of the highest moment and importance to us, are, as we might expect from the wisdom and goodness of God, revealed in the clearest manner; and we are therefore bound with the fullest

fullest assurance to believe. The only conceivable end, and as well, the declared design of religion is to lead men by a life of holiness or sincere obedience here, to happiness hereafter. To this end all its precepts, doctrines, and institutions, manifestly tend. Our Saviour came to call sinners to repentance; to purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. The scriptures are given to make the man of God perfect, and thoroughly furnished unto all good works: and to teach us that by patient continuance in well-doing, we must seek for glory, honour, and immortality.

If then the end of faith is practice, those doctrines are of the first importance in our belief, which have the most practical influence on our lives: * that without holiness no man shall see the Lord—† that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God—‡ that if we will enter into life we must keep the commandments—§ that the wicked shall go into everlasting punishment, and the righteous

• Heb. xii. 14. † 1 Cor. v. 9. ‡ Matt. xix. 17.

§ Matt. xxv. 46.

righteous into life eternal. These are some of the fundamental doctrines of christianity. Than these there are no doctrines of more consequence to engage our attention: none more clearly revealed to command our assent. To hold fast our profession in these without wavering, is one of the first duties of faith. To question or controvert these, to espouse doctrines which enervate or evade the force of them, is to incur the guilt of a more dangerous heresy, than that of opposing any of the more speculative doctrines of christianity.

I mean not to pronounce indiscriminately all those to be hereticks, who in their lives or tenets deny these practical truths: because in the idea which is usually affixed to this character is implied an open profession and attachment to erroneous and dangerous opinions, and a zeal to propagate them in the world: whereas there are few so hardy as to avow their unbelief of the practical doctrines, or those which enforce the moral duties of christianity. But if there are any who decry the practical precepts or moral duties of the gospel, or depreciate

ciate the character of righteousness, holiness, and sanctity, which it holds out to our imitation; whose principles supersede the necessity of good works, of obedience and a holy life, or who make the life of a sinner consistent with the hopes of the gospel: this is, more or less, in its several degrees, the most dangerous heresy that can be embraced or taught;

Here then we have a rule to judge by, and which the unlearned and ignorant christian may apply, when his faith is in danger of being misled; or when unnecessary fears and scruples arise in his mind, whether he be in the faith. If we are called to believe in matters of doubtful disputation, their being doubtful and not clearly revealed, is itself a presumption that they are not of the first importance to be believed. We may be less solicitous about them: and if our conscience condemn us not for an evil heart of unbelief, may have confidence towards God, that we have all the faith that is necessary and essential to salvation. If we are careful to do the will of God and impartial in our in-

quiries after truth; we shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God or of man. If they tend in any degree to loosen the obligations of morality, to flatter the sinner into security, or to substitute any thing in the place of real righteousness; we ought to reject them, as contrary to the general tenor of the gospel, and to those truths which are most clearly revealed.

If any passages of scripture, taken separately and by themselves, seem to bear a different aspect, or lead us to question the obligations I have mentioned, our faith in these leading fundamental truths ought not still to be shaken. We must and ought to suspect that the meaning of them is mistaken; and shall assuredly find, that when considered and taken in their whole connection, they will admit and require a very different construction. The word of truth, which is always according to godliness, cannot be at variance with itself. And sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than one tittle of these plain and awful truths shall fail.

St,

St. Peter hath told us, that there are some things in St. Paul's epistles which are hard to be understood, which those that are unlearned and unstable wrest to their own destruction. And we learn from St. James, that this apostle's doctrine of justification by faith without works, had been miserably mistaken and perverted to a dangerous use even in his time. And if there were those difficulties and dangerous mistakes in the early times of the apostles, when the language in which these epistles were written was generally understood, and the different occasions upon which they were written may be supposed to be better known; how much must these difficulties be increased to the unlearned of the present times: and how carefully guarded should they be against being misled by such interpretations of doubtful texts of scripture, as are of dangerous, or only suspicious tendency!

It remains yet to be considered in the last place what the duty of faith in the great articles of religion implies; or when we may be said to believe them aright.

aright. I have mentioned, you see, two sorts of reasons for believing the truths of the gospel. The one is the evidence of these truths themselves; or the natural grounds upon which we believe them. The other is the moral reason, or final cause; the end, design, or the use of believing. The former of these reasons will prevail alike for the belief of all the truths recorded in the scriptures. The latter, derived from the moment and consequences of believing, will make an infinite difference between them. Both these reasons must co-operate in forming a true principle of faith in the believer. The import and intention of the doctrine must be attended to and believed; otherwise there will be no meaning or use in believing.

That our Saviour Christ was born in Bethlehem and died on mount Calvary, is as true as that he was the son of the living God, invested with the divine authority of the father, and that when he speaks it is the voice of heaven — as true as that he hath opened to us the everlasting doors of life and immortality; and that he will raise us up at the last day.

But

But these truths are not equally the objects of our faith; because the first of them are of no use in application; and the latter are the most important of all truths that were ever founded in the ears of mankind, and the most powerful motives to a holy life. In the former we may be safely and innocently ignorant: but it is a very culpable neglect not to inquire and satisfy ourselves of the truth of the latter; the most dangerous infidelity not to believe them with the whole heart.

The doctrines which are directed to the heart, and are designed to put the active powers of the mind in motion, we must open the heart to receive; and receive with that emotion and impression of mind which they are adapted and intended to produce in us. The truths which are designed to influence our lives, we must not only believe but adopt as principles of action; to be applied in the whole conduct and government of ourselves. In a word if we would know whether we believe aright, we must inquire of our actions, of the temper, sentiments, and ruling passions of the mind;

mind; whether these correspond with the doctrines we believe. The faith which gives us the name of christians is one thing; and that which makes us christians indeed, or true disciples of Christ, is another. He that saith I know him, as the apostle tells us, and by knowing Christ is in the language of scripture the same with believing in him, — he that saith, I know or believe in Christ, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar.* In the scripture sense every finner, whatever be the system of his faith, whatever he believes in word and profession, is an unbeliever. Hereby, saith our Saviour, shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another; if ye keep this which is my peculiar commandment: not if ye call me Lord, and profess your belief in my name, but if ye keep my commandments, and do the will of my father which is in heaven. And St. James very justly derides as insignificant, that faith which is unaccompanied by obedience. † Shew me thy faith, saith he, without works; I will shew thee my faith by my works.

This

* 1 John ii. 4.

† James ii. 18.

This then is the surest criterion, and mark by which we may judge whether we are in the faith. For assuredly if our lives are corrupt and impure, our faith is also spurious, corrupt, and impure: whatever church we belong to, whatever creed we profess, our faith is vain, we are yet in our sins. Whatever hopes we may build upon the rectitude of our opinions, and our zeal for the truth, our portion will at last be with the hypocrites and unbelievers.

S E R M O N I V .

ACTS XX. 24.

*Neither count I my life dear unto myself,
so that I might finish my course with
joy.*

THIS is a declaration worthy of the faith and piety of an apostle; and which shews the force and power of true christian principles, when rooted and cultivated in the mind.

St. Paul was now taking his final leave of the elders or pastors in the church which he had planted at Ephesus. And there is a peculiar propriety in the words of the text, and those which follow, when we consider them as addressed to his fellow labourers in the ministry of the gospel; whom he seems here by his example indirectly to forewarn of the dangers to which their situation exposed them,

them, and of the consequent duties expected from them. And now behold, saith he, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem; not knowing the things which shall befall me there; save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I received of the Lord Jesus Christ, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

But the principles upon which this declaration of the apostle is founded, are such as are common to all true christians; and the duties resulting from them are such as are bound upon christians in general. Disinterestedness, magnanimity, and true fortitude, whether in resisting temptations, in facing dangers, or supporting afflictions, are, like all the other virtues, carried to the highest pitch in the christian system of morals; and are more adequately supported by the articles of the christian creed, than by the best arguments drawn from reason or the sublimest philosophy.

I shall

I shall therefore in recommending the apostle's example to your imitation inquire,

First what those principles were which dictated the generous declaration in the text: and which supported our apostle with joy, through life, and through death itself, in a conduct consonant thereto.

And shall, secondly, endeavour to shew that these principles and a deportment suitable to them, are implied in the profession and character of every true christian.

And shall, lastly, apply the whole to the use and instruction of common christians, in such reflections as may arise from the subject.

First then the thing imported in this declaration of the apostle, is plainly a steady resolution to discharge his duty in all circumstances; an intire devotion of himself, of all his cares, interests, and fortunes, to the service of
F God;

God; and a total resignation to his will under all the trials and afflictions that might befall him. This is the character assumed in the text. And how far St. Paul had a right to take it to himself, we learn from the history of his christian life. In which we find an ardour and force of mind, superior to all the temptations of ease, and indolence, and surmounting all the difficulties and opposition to which the most hazardous situation, and obnoxious enterprise could expose him.

Engaged in the greatest and most arduous undertaking which could be put into the heart of man, that of changing the religion of all nations, turning the heathens from dumb idols to serve the living God, and bringing them to acknowledge a crucified teacher for their Lord and Saviour: he had every difficulty and every danger to encounter; had all the powers of the world armed against him; all the passions and prejudices of mankind to contend with; all the evils that bigotry, pride, and persecution could inflict, awaiting him. Yet none of these things moved or discouraged him. We see him
car-

carrying this unwelcome doctrine into all parts of the world; traversing distant countries; sailing through storms and tempests, without rest and without weariness; planting churches in Italy, Greece, and Asia; and, in a word, establishing true religion every where; and bringing whole nations to the obedience of faith.

What then were the principles which could inspirit an attempt so perilous, and in all human prospects so desperate as this; and which supplied such invincible courage and fortitude in the execution of it? These could be no other than a pious trust and confidence in the goodness of God; an assurance of the truth of his promises; and a joyful hope of his reward in another life. "I know, saith he, that this shall turn to my salvation—according to my earnest expectation, and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, or disappointed; but that with all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."†

F 2

The

† Phil. i. 20, 21.

The miraculous call of St. Paul to the ministry of the gospel, carried with it such conviction of its truth, as was indeed irresistible. The abundance of the revelations with which he was afterwards favoured from heaven, make it no wonder that his whole mind and soul should be possessed with the ideas of religion, the thoughts of another life, and a sense of the vanity and emptiness of this. And how strongly impressed these sentiments were on his mind, his writings sufficiently declare; which breathe a spirit above mortality; and a faith anticipating the joys of heaven. * I am crucified, saith he, with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the son of God; who loved me and gave himself for me.

Another leading principle in the conduct of our apostle, and which in the christian system is inseparable from the former, was the love of Christ; and consequently of his service.
St.

* Gal. ii. 20.

St. Paul, tho' a chosen vessel to the Lord, had opposed his religion and persecuted his church. He had much forgiven him, and therefore he loved much. The love of Christ constrained him. This principle made the most rigorous duties a pleasure: over-ruled the feelings and apprehensions of nature; and taught him to rejoice in tribulation, and to be counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ; "in all things, says he, † approving ourselves as the ministers of Christ; in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; by honour and dishonour; by evil report and good report; as deceivers and yet true; as dying and behold we live; as sorrowful yet always rejoicing; as poor yet making many rich; as having nothing and yet possessing all things."

Hear with what triumph and joy he exults in "the force of this victorious principle. ‡ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the

F 3

sword?

† 2 Cor. vi. 4-7. ‡ Rom. viii. 35.

The miraculous call of St. Paul to the ministry of the gospel, carried with it such conviction of its truth, as was indeed irresistible. The abundance of the revelations with which he was afterwards favoured from heaven, make it no wonder that his whole mind and soul should be possessed with the ideas of religion, the thoughts of another life, and a sense of the vanity and emptiness of this. And how strongly impressed these sentiments were on his mind, his writings sufficiently declare; which breathe a spirit above mortality; and a faith anticipating the joys of heaven. * I am crucified, saith he, with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the son of God; who loved me and gave himself for me.

Another leading principle in the conduct of our apostle, and which in the christian system is inseparable from the former, was the love of Christ; and consequently of his service.
St.

* Gal. ii. 20.

St. Paul, tho' a chosen vessel to the Lord, had opposed his religion and persecuted his church. He had much forgiven him, and therefore he loved much. The love of Christ constrained him. This principle made the most rigorous duties a pleasure: over-ruled the feelings and apprehensions of nature; and taught him to rejoice in tribulation, and to be counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ; "in all things, says he, † approving ourselves as the ministers of Christ; in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; by honour and dishonour; by evil report and good report; as deceivers and yet true; as dying and behold we live; as sorrowful yet always rejoicing; as poor yet making many rich; as having nothing and yet possessing all things."

Hear with what triumph and joy he exults in "the force of this victorious principle. ‡ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the

F 3

sword?

† 2 Cor. vi. 4-7.

‡ Rom. viii. 35.

sword? § In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth" — nothing in the compass of space or the reach of time — "shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus."

How far these principles and the duties resulting from them are necessary to, and expected in all christians in general, I come in the next place to inquire.

Here then it is obvious to observe, that a love of God in Christ, a belief and trust in his promises, and an absolute reliance on his word and truth, are all of them implied in the faith of a christian; in that faith which makes us christians: and resolve at last into this one principle. We cannot believe in God without believing that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. We cannot believe in Christ without hope and trust in that life and im-

immortality which he hath brought to light by his gospel. These are the first principles of the oracles of God; the first elements of the christian faith; and in which those who are babes in Christ, are supposed to be rooted and grounded. Again, this faith naturally worketh by love. We cannot believe in Christ, in the great things which God hath done and Christ hath suffered for our redemption, without the highest love and veneration for his name; without dedicating every generous affection of the heart to his service. Thus the principles which animated our holy apostle are all summed up and implied in faith; in that faith which is professed by every christian, and which is essential to this name and character.

And it is as certain that an absolute unlimited obedience to the divine commandments, a perfect submission of our will in all things, to the will and law of God, an unshaken allegiance to heaven in all circumstances of life, and death itself, are duties incumbent upon all christians.

But are all apostles? Are all workers of miracles? Have all the gift of intrepidity, the patience and courage of martyrs? I answer, that all are not called to this fiery trial; but it is the duty of all to be prepared to follow where the voice of God and conscience calls them. We are commanded to give up all to our duty; *to part with houses and lands, with wife and children for Christ's sake and the gospel's; †to cut off a right hand, and to pluck out a right eye, if they prove the occasion of offence, or interfere with a present duty. In a word we must deny ourselves every gratification, and sacrifice our dearest interests when they stand in competition with our duty. This is indeed the only proof we can give of our virtue, and in all cases the standard and measure of it. As much as there is of this resignation to the will of God, of this fidelity to heaven and to our duty, exemplified in our actions, so much is there, and only so much, of virtue in them.

This

* Matt. xix. 29.

† Matt. v. 29.

This then is in general the duty expected from, the rule of practice to all christians; that they pay an universal unreserved obedience to all the commands of God. If different degrees of virtue are expected from christians in different situations and circumstances, our obedience must however, as far as it is tried, answer to this test. If some are called, for the high purposes of providence, to the severest trials; to give glory to God and to do honour to his religion; if, like our Lord himself, and his apostles and martyrs, they are made perfect through sufferings; if their virtue comes out like gold from the furnace of adversity; these shall be great in the kingdom of heaven. Him that overcometh, saith our Saviour, will I make a pillar in the temple of my God: and I will confess his name before my father, and before his angels.*

They whose virtue is assaulted by fewer temptations, if they hold fast their integrity, and walk in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless;

* Rev. iii. 5—12.

less; if their faith is unshaken, and resolved against farther trials; may purchase to themselves a good degree of confidence towards God, though they have not yet resisted unto blood; nor given the last proof of their faith and obedience. But he that is weakest in the faith; whose trust and faith in God are unequal to the higher conflicts of temptation; though his virtue be accepted, will doubtless be the least in the kingdom of heaven. In our father's house are many mansions: and according to our different improvements in virtue and goodness here, will different honours and degrees of happiness be assigned us hereafter.

Those who are called to the highest achievements in virtuous action, are, we may presume to suppose, favoured with more talents of grace and strength to enable them for the warfare. And we are also assured that God will impart still farther aids of his spirit to those who want and faithfully ask it. But the scriptures, which call upon all to be perfect, as far as according to their proportion and the measures of humanity they

they can be; inculcate every where these higher duties as befitting all christians in general, and as alone worthy of the christian name and character; and seem to suppose the ordinary gifts of the spirit, vouchsafed alike to all christians in the revelation of the gospel, sufficient to qualify them for very high attainments in virtue. If any man will be my disciple, saith our blessed Saviour, let him take up his cross and follow me. "Who so loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me." "My brethren saith St. Peter, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some new thing happened unto you; but rejoice, in as much as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."† "For even hereunto, saith St. Peter, were ye called, for Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we might follow his steps."‡

Indeed what is there to which the faith of a christian, when improved and
made

† 1 Peter iv. 12.

‡ 1 Peter ii. 21.

made habitual to the mind, is not equal? To what high degrees of vigour and efficacy may we not raise this principle by a frequent contemplation of the great objects of it: God infinitely powerful, wise, and good; Christ the redeemer, and saviour, and friend; and a life of infinite duration in another state, in which we shall be advancing in knowledge, virtue, and happiness, without end. What force and energy will it not give to all the powers of the mind, when our faith assures us that God will stand by us and save us, and the light of his countenance shine upon us; when our reason and conscience applaud us; when our interest, our ambition, our hopes and our fears conspire in leading us to the same pursuits; and have all of them an object of infinite importance before them. Why indeed should we think it strange as if some new thing happened to us, to be called to any labours or sufferings in the service of God, and our own eternal interests; when we see men every day, from the flightest motives of worldly honour and ambition, even court dangers

dangers and difficulties ; and brave death itself in its most terrible forms.

Do we really believe that we have immortal souls, destined to a life of happiness or misery without end? And can we shrink at the fiercest dangers that intercept us in our way; or be turned aside by the foolish pleasures that would beguile us of our reward? Do we indeed believe that these light afflictions and self denial, which endure for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, and can we be weary or faint in our minds? Shall we fear to encounter any difficulties, or doubt to sacrifice our most darling inclinations to his pleasure, in whose favour is life eternal, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore? Can we reflect on the love of Christ which led him through a painful, laborious, and friendless life; despising the shame and enduring the cross for our sakes? And do not our hearts burn within us; do we not feel a generous ardour and impatience to shew ourselves worthy of his name? Shall we not count it all joy when we fall into temptations,

tations, to prove our fidelity in following the captain of our salvation, and to please him who hath called us to be his soldiers ?

Thus our christian faith is more than sufficient to support us under all trials. “ In all things, faith the apostle, we are more than conquerors, through Christ that loved us.” This then is the victory that overcometh the world, the principle that is superior to all its temptations; its allurements, its terrors; even our faith.

But I hasten to apply what has been said to our use and instruction, in such reflections as offer themselves from the subject. If this principle be thus all powerful, and sufficient in every exigence, for the highest degrees of virtue; whence is it that its influence is so little seen on the lives of christians ? The answer is, because they are weak in the faith. They submit to the light of evidence, and readily assent to all the truths of the gospel, while nothing more is required than this consent of the mind, and a formal profession of this belief. But when for a
trial

trial of their faith they are called to sacrifice their ease, or pleasure, or interest; when temptations and difficulties arise, by and by they are offended. Speculative opinions, however well grounded, and even warmly espoused, are found often to have little effect as principles of action. Good principles are no more than good seed; which requires care and culture, and the attention and vigilance of the husbandman, to bring forth its proper fruit.

What then is the care and culture required in the present case? Or by what means may we best strengthen our faith, and increase the force of the virtuous principle within us? I answer, consideration and reflection, the frequent renewing our good resolutions, and the exercises of piety and religion.

It is certain that if we retire into ourselves, and consult our reason, whether to prefer the things temporal, or the things eternal, we shall instantly find a light from heaven shining round about us, which, though not so sensible and alarming as that of St. Paul at his
con-

conversion, will yet dart irresistible conviction into the mind and awaken all the powers of the soul into action. This then is the great secret in the religious life; to transfer the convictions of the mind to the heart. We must dwell on the grounds of our faith, and the infinite moment and importance of the great truths it presents to us, till it has caught hold of the affections, and becomes the ruling principle in the heart. We must allot some portion of our time to impress these awful thoughts on our minds; and shall find no portion of our time so worthily or more pleasingly spent. We must habituate ourselves to the service of God by the exercises of religion, and by a constant attendance on his word and ordinances; which have a natural tendency to spiritualize our affections, and to direct them to things above. We must every day renew the dedication of ourselves to God and virtue; resigning all our cares and interests into his hands; and committing our souls unto him in well doing, as unto a faithful creator. When we have attained to this resignation of ourselves to

to his will and have learned to refer every thing to God; we shall not only finish, but run the whole of our course with joy. We shall find infinite pleasure and delight in the most rigorous acts of our duty. And if we are not called to the sharpest trials of our faith, shall yet be prepared for them; and may be as well accepted of God, if we have raised as high the force and vigour of the virtuous principle in the hidden man of the heart. By referring every thing to God, we shall enhance the virtue of our good actions; shall give virtue to the most indifferent; and derive a rational satisfaction to our consciences from the minutest and easiest parts of duty. Not the least of our good deeds when arising from this principle will fall to the ground, or be forgotten by our father who is in heaven. A cup of cold water given for his sake will not lose its reward.

Let this then be our care, as the great thing needful, to root the principles of our faith firmly in the mind; to recall frequently to our view the momentous truths it imports; by con-

G

stant

stant reflection and the exercises of religion to keep them always awake and active in our breasts. So shall we with patience and chearfulness run the race that is set before us, and finish our course with joy: and may at last take to ourselves that happy triumph of our apostle, I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith: henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which God the righteous judge shall give me in that day.

S E R M O N V.

ROMANS xii. II.

*Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit,
serving the Lord.*

BY business in the text is meant the business of religion: and the diligence recommended in it, is diligence in our religious duties, or particularly diligence in good works. The words that precede and introduce the text are — “abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another in brotherly love; in honour preferring one another. Not slothful in diligence,” which is the literal translation of the text: that is, not slothful in this which is your proper business, the true object of your diligence: “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;” that is, applying to it with zeal and attention, as your proper duty to

God: as you tender his favour whose subjects and servants you eminently are.

The business of religion and the business of human life are one and the same. The end and design of both is to prepare us for the kingdom of heaven, to make us worthy of the favour and love of God, and meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. An object in which all our other interests are lost and swallowed up, and from its relation to which the value and importance of every thing else must finally be determined. If then this be our first and greatest object, if we would attend this one thing necessary, this the only business of life, as we ought, it must be our concern to know —

First, in what it consists, to have distinct ideas of the duty or business itself.

Secondly, to learn and use the means that are necessary to accomplish it.

And thirdly, to apply to it with a zeal and assiduity proportioned to the importance and the difficulty of it.

The

The business then which we are to attend, the service in which God hath employed us, is to make ourselves good men and good christians; to conform to the rules which reason or conscience and religion prescribe; to subdue our corrupt inclinations; to form in ourselves the habits of piety and virtue; and to perfect holiness in the fear of God. But because men have entertained very different notions of the religious character, of that holiness, righteousness or perfection, which christianity requires; it will therefore be expedient to see more particularly in what this character consists; and to guard distinctly against those mistakes which superstition and enthusiasm have introduced into this subject.

And one of the first things which it imports us here to know is that religion, or the character which it requires in all true christians, does not consist in knowledge, speculation, or opinion: but in practice, or in a disposition of mind to fulfill all righteousness. The apostle supposes that we may understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and not be

the better for it. We may know all the doctrines of religion, and all the duties of it, without having our lives influenced and governed by it. And in this case our religious character will be the worse, our guilt and condemnation will be the greater in proportion as we sin against greater light and knowledge. The scripture rule is, if ye know these things happy are ye if ye do them—and * he that knoweth his master's will and doth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.

In like manner it does not consist in faith, in believing the gospel and all the articles of it; but in applying this belief to our practice; in carrying our virtue to the highest pitch we can by the help of it; in a good life formed upon christian principles; the sole use and intent of which is to make † the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. When the gospel was first preached to the jews and gentiles by our Saviour and his apostles, faith or believing the gospel, and receiving it for their rule of life and manners entitled the converts to it, to a par-

* Luke xii. 47.

† 2 Tim. iii. 17.

pardon for their past sins. They entered upon a new state of trial and probation; the guilt of their past sins was washed away, as was significantly represented to them by the washing of baptism, on their repentance and embracing the gospel, or dedicating themselves for the future to a holy and christian life. And to their case all the promises made to faith, of justification and salvation, that is, being pardoned, saved or delivered from the guilt and punishment of sin, will be found to belong. But to those who are already christians, if they do not live up to their profession, faith in the gospel or believing what our blessed Saviour did and suffered for us, will be so far from intitling them to pardon, that it will in the highest manner aggravate the guilt of every sin, and make it more exceeding sinful.

We are indeed taught to believe that repentance will still through the merits of Christ, intitle us to a pardon for sin. But we are no where taught that a bare reliance on the merits of Christ, or an empty sorrow for the sins we have committed, will intitle us to this

pardon. The repentance to which this promise is made implies an actual amendment of life; or at least such a sincere resolution to forsake sin, as would, if God should give us a space to repent, that is, time and opportunity to evidence the sincerity of our resolution, prove effectual and fruitful in all good works. We must imitate the life and example of our blessed Saviour, in endeavouring to fulfill all righteousness, before we can take to ourselves the benefits of his sufferings, or have any interest in his merits and mediation with the father.

And this leads me farther to observe, that the character we are inquiring after does not consist in a voluntary or affected humility, in disclaiming all power and ability in ourselves; in making our good works and righteousness go for nothing; in relying wholly on the righteousness of Christ, and waiting for the operations of the spirit to infuse a new principle of regeneration in us, to convert us by an over-ruling power to a state of grace and favour with God. This, however pious it may seem, is to make God the author of sin, as well as of
of

of all good: however humble it may appear, is to expect and pretend to more extraordinary gifts, and higher degrees of assistance from heaven, than are any where promised to the sincere believer.

The particulars then which constitute this character are first, an habitual piety towards God—in which are included a love which represents him as the source and fountain of all goodness; as the father, friend, and benefactor of mankind; and inseparable from which is a fear of offending him: faith and trust in his truth and goodness; resignation to his will; attention to his word, and a regard to him in all the offices of life. Secondly an universal charity to men—in which are implied the duties of forbearing and forgiving one another; of peacefulness, gentleness, meekness, faithfulness and truth; together with the active duties of kindness, benevolence, and humanity. And lastly temperance in the government of ourselves, and in the indulgence of the bodily appetites and affections—in which are included sobriety, chastity and purity in our thoughts, as well as our actions; moderation and decency

decency in the innocent enjoyments of life; as well as a total abstinence from sinful pleasures, and all such excesses as pollute and defile the man.

These are the things which we necessarily approve as excellent and praise worthy in ourselves and others. These form the character of righteousness, virtue or perfection in man. In these then the business before us consists: and to cultivate them in ourselves, is the proper end and object of all our religious endeavours.

Accordingly the whole system of religion is purposely formed and adapted to this end. And the best means we can use for the attainment of it, is a constant attention to the doctrines and ordinances which it prescribes and teaches. The doctrines of religion are intended wholly to enforce the precepts of it; and the intention of the spiritual exercises which it enjoins, the use of it's sabbaths and sacraments is to keep our attention to these doctrines always awake; and to raise in us that activity and zeal in the discharge of our duty which are recom-

recommended in the text. These are indeed duties themselves, and if they had no farther use, are a service we owe to God; and to be performed with a fervour and application of mind befitting his service: but they are farther designed and wisely calculated to raise in us a zeal and assiduity in the discharge of every other duty; to bring the motives to them constantly before our eyes, and to direct them to heaven and virtue, the proper destination of man.

But beside the means which religion prescribes for our improvement in virtue, our own reason and observation will supply us with many useful rules for this purpose.

And first the least reflection on this subject will teach us the necessity of observing some rule and discipline in the government of ourselves, and of laying out our life by some rational plan and model, in order to train up and fortify our virtue, and guard it in the best manner against the enemies to which it is exposed.

It

It is by slow degrees that human nature rises to perfection in any thing. Every art and useful habit requires time and pains to bring it to maturity. The seeds of virtue sown by nature or planted by education, grow up like the vegetable grain; which brings forth first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. In the mean time care and culture are necessary on our part, as well as the dew of heaven, to prevent them from withering for lack of moisture; and to preserve them from the briars and thorns, the cares and riches of the world, which will naturally grow up with and choak them. It is necessary therefore that we live by rule and system, and not suffer our time to run out at random, without any principles to trace our actions from, or any concern to what consequences they lead.

It is not indeed necessary or possible for us to take into this plan every action and occurrence of life: but the great articles which fill up our time, our business, amusements, pleasures, company and the like, it is absolutely necessary

fary that we be able to account for, and to justify to our reason and conscience; and that the general course and tenour of our lives be such as comports perfectly with the practice of our duty, and promises in its natural tendency security and improvement to our virtue.

A necessary part of this œconomy it is obvious must be the turning our thoughts frequently to these subjects; allotting a part of our time to retirement and recollection; that we may compare our actions with their proper rule, and observe when we have failed in, and by what means we have been seduced from our duty; what progress we have made in correcting our bad habits, reforming our temper and inclinations; and what means have been most conducive to any advances we have made in virtue.

And when by this inspection into ourselves we have learned where our strength and weakness lies; a second rule which experience will teach us is to avoid all such occasions as have
tempted

tempted us to evil; and to embrace all such opportunities as we have found to be instrumental in improving our virtue.

If for instance we find our time so dissipated by vain amusements as to have no leisure for the duties I have been recommending, and for attending our spiritual concerns; we must consider these pleasures, however innocent in themselves, as our greatest enemies; as preying silently upon our virtue and happiness; and resolve either intirely to forsake, or to reduce them within narrower bounds; lest haply we be found lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. If the company we keep and our connections in society have been the means of seducing us from virtue, we must arm ourselves effectually against their influence and example; or renounce all such friendship as is enmity against God. Whatever sins we have been most liable to through natural temper, the force of habit, or our situation in life, into these we shall be most liable to lapse again. Against these therefore we should point our principal attention and vigilance; that

that we may be doubly armed where we are most exposed to danger. In like manner whatever means we have found effectual to guard or improve our virtue, these we should be careful to renew, and repeat as oft as opportunity offers, or occasion requires.

And, this leads me to a third rule which reason and experience jointly recommend to us. If the business of religion be to form in ourselves the habit of every virtue, it is certain that these habits are to be acquired only by use and practice, like those of the body. To improve in virtue we must keep our virtue in action. If we would form our minds to piety, the rule is to be constant in the exercises of piety and devotion: and by setting God always before us in our acts of prayer and praise, as our creator, governor, and judge, we shall by degrees make a sense of his presence habitual to the mind, and find all our thoughts and actions influenced by it.

In like manner would we have our hearts habitually warmed with that charity and benevolence in which so large

large a part of christian duty consists; we must form this temper in ourselves by acts of charity and benevolence. By gratifying our generous affections they will acquire new strength; as they will be in danger of being extinguished by inactivity and sloth. It is by feeding the hungry, cloathing the naked, and succouring the distressed, and by exerting ourselves in every labour of love, that we must arrive at that fervent charity which is the end of the commandment, and the accomplishment of the christian character.

Again would we gain that command over ourselves in which the virtues of temperance and continence consist; we must use ourselves to acts of continence and self denial: we must consult our reason as well as our senses and appetites in the gratifications to which we indulge; and secure the liberty of the mind by mortifying the body, and bringing into subjection our most prevailing inclinations. And it may be sometimes a prudence to abstain even from innocent pleasures, for this very reason, because our inclinations lead too strongly

strongly to them. Thus too we may learn by forgiving to forgive; by passing over lighter offences to bear with equanimity those that are greater.

By these means we shall get the habit of self command; the power of controuling our appetites and passions. And thus by abounding in every good word and work we shall learn to abound yet more and more.

Another means which I shall recommend as highly useful to a virtuous course of life, is to keep always uppermost in our thoughts the greater and more affecting doctrines of christianity: such I mean as are directly pointed to influence our practice, and to stimulate us to our duty, by exciting our hopes and fears, and putting the active powers of the mind in motion. * The word of God, saith the apostle, is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword. It's doctrines, if we will attend to them, will pierce even to the soul and spirit, and penetrate the very joints and marrow. The most hardened

H

sinner,

* Heb. iv. 12.

finer, if he will suffer himself to reason with St. Paul on the comprehensive duties of righteousness and temperance, and the account he is to give at the judgment to come, will like † Felix tremble; the whole frame of his mind will be shaken; his conscience will reclaim aloud, and carry the terrors of the Lord into the inmost recesses of the soul. We may indeed shut our eyes against the light of truth; but if truth be still the same, and we must stand or fall by it for ever; if it cannot yield or bend to us, but necessarily controuls and must controul the whole world; if it will at last find us out and bind us in its strong chains for ever; why should we not yield to it immediately; and be governed by it here, while its light will lead us into the way of peace, rather than be reprov'd and condemn'd by it hereafter? ‡ The words that I speak unto you, saith our blessed Lord, the same shall judge you at the last day.

Let this then, with the other great truths I am going to mention, be treasured

† Acts xxiv. 25.

‡ John xii. 48.

fured up in your minds, and made habitual to your thoughts—that it is appointed for all men once to die and after that the judgment—that we have here no abiding but are strangers and sojourners, travelling to a better country—that God is a present witness to all our actions and will bring every secret thing into judgment, whether it be good or evil—that there is joy in heaven over every sinner that repenteth—that without repentance, without holiness, no man shall see the Lord. Let these and the like momentous truths, together with a due sense of their weight and importance be deeply impressed on your minds, that they may be readily called up to confront to the suggestions of unlawful pleasure, of avarice and ambition; to encourage every virtuous affection, every motion towards good; and to kindle that holy zeal and fervour in your duty, which are recommended in the text.

And here let me particularly call up your attention to the argument held out in the text, that doing our duty is serving the Lord; is conforming to the

will and pleasure of the great ruler of all things, whose will we know to be wisdom and goodness itself. This consideration alone will to an ingenuous mind make every instance of duty a pleasure and delight; and fill it with a generous exultation and triumph, when with a conscious superiority, it overcometh the world; and looks down with contempt on every sordid interest or pleasure that would seduce it from its allegiance to the governor of the universe. The exertion of gratitude is one of the most pleasing emotions of the mind. And when we can assure ourselves that God is pleased with every act of homage we pay to his authority; that we can offer some little tribute to the author of our being; that he will accept our poor endeavours as some return for the innumerable mercies which we have received from him; what more can be wanted to give cheerfulness and alacrity to our duty? By what means can we give such importance and dignity to ourselves, as by taking for our plan that of the great Lord of the universe? And what are all the pleasures of the sensual and voluptuary compared to the

the satisfaction of knowing that we are acting upon the principles of unerring wisdom, and conforming to the designs which infinite goodness has laid out for the happiness and perfection of all it's creatures ?

We can scarce on any occasion present this idea even in the most transient manner to the mind, without finding it's power; whether in giving us the victory over temptations, resignation under afflictions, or joy and triumph in every act of obedience.

But I have not time at present to do justice to this argument, and shall therefore hope to resume it at some other opportunity.

the foundation of knowing that we are
acting upon the principles of unerring
wisdom, and containing in our designs
which infinite goodness has laid out for
the happiness and perfection of all its
creatures.

We can learn no any other lesson
this idea even in the most transient man-
ner to the mind, without finding it a
power, which is able to do every thing
over which it is directed in every act
of our lives.

And I have not time at present to do
justice to this argument, and shall there-
fore leave to others to do what they

S E R M O N VI.

ROMANS xii. 11.

*Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit,
serving the Lord.*

THE business here recommended to us is, as I have formerly observed to you, the business of religion, serving the Lord: and the design of this precept of the apostle is to call up our attention to this business as that which most requires, and best deserves our zeal and diligence.

To the due performance of this it is necessary, as in every other business, that we know — first, in what it consists; that we have distinct ideas of the duty or business itself: secondly, that we learn and practise the means which are necessary to accomplish it: and thirdly, that we apply to it with a zeal and assiduity

proportioned to the importance and the difficulty of it.

Under the second of these heads, I lately mentioned to you the duties which religion prescribes for our growing in grace, or for the guard and improvement of our virtue: and to these added certain other rules of practice which reason and experience teach us to be useful to these ends. Among the latter of these I particularly recommended to you the treasuring up in your minds and keeping uppermost in your thoughts the greater and more affecting doctrines of christianity; such as are more directly pointed to influence our practice and to stimulate us to our duty, by exciting our hopes and fears, and putting the active powers of the mind in motion: such as may be readily called up to confront to the suggestions of unlawful pleasure; of avarice and ambition; to encourage every virtuous affection, every motion towards good: and to kindle that holy zeal and fervour in our duty, which are recommended in the text.

And

And the last of these, which I have yet but barely mentioned, was the argument suggested in the text, that doing our duty is serving the Lord: is conforming to the will and pleasure of the great ruler of all things. A motive, in the first place particularly adapted to give pleasure and alacrity to our duty, by making every instance of it an act of love and gratitude to our supreme benefactor. What shall we render unto the Lord for all the benefits which he hath done unto us? If by our best services we can repay any part of that debt of love and duty we owe him; if he is pleased to accept of every effort we make to please him, the least act of homage we pay to his authority; what more can be wanted to give zeal and ardor to our duty, and to engage every generous affection of the heart in his service? What greater pleasure can there be to an ingenuous mind, than to sacrifice our own will and pleasure to him of whose free gift it cometh, that we can do unto him any laudable service; and to whom we owe the very power of disobeying him? Does not every difficulty we encounter in his
 ser-

service, every pleasure we renounce for his sake, give us more pleasure in proportion to the sacrifice we make; when we consider it as an humble tribute, as a free-will offering brought to his altar? Does not our conscience exult with joy, when by resisting the temptations of the world, we have had it in our power to give some proof of our loyalty to the God that made us? Thus will this principle, if we adopt it with sincerity and graft it thoroughly in our hearts, convert the severest pains of self-denial into pleasure, and be a source of joy and satisfaction in the most difficult trials of virtue.

By gratifying our generous affections we shall have ample amends for mortifying the inferior appetites and passions that belong to us. But this pleasure will be still farther increased when we trace this principle with the eye of reason to its true foundation, and view its connection with the first great truths of religion. For what is serving the Lord but conforming to the most perfect and unerring reason, and furthering the purposes of infinite wisdom and goodness?

And

And how then can we give such dignity and importance to ourselves as by reflecting that we are carrying on the designs of providence in this lower world, and considering ourselves as authorised by God to maintain and support the order which he has established by discharging the duties of our station, and contributing within our province to the good of the whole: whether in the offices of charity by instructing the ignorant, comforting the weak, and relieving the distressed; or at least by setting an example of industry, probity, and truth to others?

It may perhaps seem too presuming to rank our services thus high, and to be arrogating too high a sphere to ourselves. But this our faith gives us a right with all humility to claim. The scriptures in all these instances acknowledge us as fellow-workers together with God. They exhort us to be followers of God with confidence and alacrity as dear children; to aspire after an humble imitation of his infinite perfections; to be holy because he is holy; and to be perfect as our father which is in heaven

ven is perfect. Unworthy as we are and unprofitable servants, they permit us to refer ourselves in all things to God; to make him the final object of all our aims and pursuits. They represent our poorest services as attracting his regard, and as interesting heaven itself in our happiness and success. Whatsoever ye have done, says our blessed Lord, unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Our prayers and our alms are had in remembrance before God. And there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth. Besides our direct addresses to God in prayer and praise, every act of charity and beneficence is a sacrifice with which he is well pleased. Every act of temperance and command over our sensual appetites is presenting our bodies a living sacrifice holy and acceptable unto him. Thus highly by serving God do we honour ourselves; and secure the purest pleasures of the mind by gratifying the noblest ambition, and the best and worthiest affections that belong to our nature.

But secondly, of such use is this principle in the religious life, that without
it

it the virtue of our best actions will be lost: and with it the most indifferent actions will take a value and become acceptable to God. As rational creatures, conformity to reason, to our ideas of order and moral perfection, which are inseparable from reason, is our only rule of duty. As religious creatures, conformity to the will of God is the sum and substance of all virtue. These two principles must ever coincide, and unite in the virtuous character. As far as they prevail in our actions and conduct, so far only is the praise of virtue due to them. The apostle tells us we may give all our goods to feed the poor and yet want charity. This is plainly the case if we do it from ostentation or vain glory, or indeed from any human considerations whatsoever. It is, as I have said, in the hidden man of the heart that we are to look for our true character. And it is well if our best actions are pure in his sight who searcheth the heart and knoweth all things. On the other hand whatever we do with singleness or sincerity of heart, however little momentous in itself, will take the character of
 right-

righteousness, and be sure of a gracious acceptance at his hand. Whofo, says our blessed Lord, shall give a cup of cold water only, to one of these little ones for my sake, shall in no wise lose his reward. Of such consequence is it to know assuredly, from what motives our actions spring, to try the ground of our heart, to prove and examine our thoughts, to look well that there be no way of wickedness in us, no latent principle of corruption to taint and sully our virtue.

Now he that has made the will of God the rule of his actions, whose heart and affections are resigned and bowed down to his service, has every virtue in one. And where there is nothing of this in the heart, the most specious appearances of virtue are nothing worth. This principle then is necessary to give their full value to our best actions; and will communicate some degree of virtue to the most indifferent. Where this is the ruling principle, where the general course and tenour of our life is planned and laid out agreeably to it, where at least the great articles which fill up our
time,

time, our business, company, pleasures, and amusements, are considered and adjusted by it, our whole life may be said to be sanctified and dedicated to God and virtue. The virtuous and religious man, when he goeth forth to his work and to his labour, while he is providing for the necessities of life, is filling up the station which his master hath appointed him, and acting up to his character and principle of serving the Lord. His recreations and pleasures give him a new pleasure, untasted by others; a pleasure not only rational but virtuous: while he is conscious that they are allowed by religion and virtue, and are given him to rejoice in by his bountiful creator, and to excite his love and gratitude to his goodness. Whatsoever ye do, saith the apostle, whether ye eat or drink, do all to the glory of God. By this art and œconomy the life of a good man becomes consecrated into one continued act or habit of religion. Every action in his common intercourse with society is an act of religious homage, a prayer, or song of praise to his maker.

And

And this leads me to observe thirdly, the excellence of this principle, in that it adapts itself with ease and readiness to every circumstance and situation of life. Are we tempted at any time to forsake our duty and to fall into sin? The reflection is at hand that this is betraying the trust reposed in us by our maker; that it is deserting a service to which we are bound by all the ties of gratitude and duty; to which we were sworn at our baptism, and to which we have bound ourselves by many solemn vows and resolutions since. The reflection comes in, that this is a call to duty; a signal to our virtue; an occasion put into our hands of shewing our obedience, and proving our allegiance and truth to our heavenly master. Does any affliction or calamity befall us? It is the cup which our heavenly father hath given us: and shall we not drink it? It is one of those things which in the comprehensive scheme of providence will work together with others for our good. Do we suffer in our good name, and is our good evil spoken of? Behold, our witness is in heaven, and our record is on high.

Thus

Thus we cannot in the flightest manner present this idea to the mind without feeling it's force in supporting and leading us into all good; and without a secret triumph and confidence in it's power and success. In every relation of life, whatever duties we owe to our neighbour, we are allowed to address them as a service to God also. And hence all the relative duties of parents and children, masters and servants, magistrates and people, are distinctly enforced upon this principle in the scripture. * "Children obey your parents in the Lord." "And ye fathers provoke not your children, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."† "Servants obey in all things your masters, not with eye service as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God. And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto men: knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for ye serve the Lord Christ." "Masters give unto your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that

* Ephes. vi. 1, 4.

† Ephes. vi. 6, 10.

ye also have a master in Heaven.”
 *[“] Let every soul be subject to the higher powers, for there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God.” “ He is the minister of God to thee for good. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath but also for conscience sake.” Thus this principle collects and strengthens every other virtuous motive and affection; and points them all to one common centre, the will of God.

Again, in whatever station or rank of life we are placed, the duties that belong to it are a service which we owe to God. It is the post which he hath given us to maintain; the part which we are to act, in conformity to the designs of his governing wisdom. In the poorest situation we may discharge this trust with as much confidence in his favour, with as much honour and advantage to ourselves, to our moral character and virtue, the only character of worth and true honour, as in the highest. It is a joy which no man can take from

us

* Rom. xiii. 1, 5.

us in the most desolate circumstances—I am poor and needy, but the Lord careth for me.

Let us hear the reasoning of an heathen philosopher upon these principles. A wise and good man, mindful who he is and whence he came, and by whom he is produced, is attentive only how he may fill his post regularly and dutifully to God. Is it thy pleasure I should continue longer in being? I will continue freely and chearfully agreeably to thy pleasure. But while I am employed in thy service, what wilt thou have me to be, a prince or private man, a senator or plebeian, a soldier or a general, a preceptor or the master of a family? Whatever post or rank thou shalt assign me, I will die a thousand times rather than desert it. Where wilt thou have me to be; at Rome, or at Athens, at Thebes, or at Gyarus? Only remember me there. If a life conformable to nature be granted, I will seek no other place but that in which I am; nor any other company but those in which I am. To all other pleasures, says he,

I 2

oppose

oppose that of being conscious that you are obeying God; and performing not in word but in deed, the duty of a wise and good man. How great a thing is it to be able to say to yourself what others are now solemnly arguing in the schools, and debating as a matter of speculation, that I am actually performing. The object they celebrate am I. Jupiter has been pleased to prove me that I might receive a sensible demonstration of this in myself, and indeed that he might see whether he has a soldier, a citizen, such as he should be, and to produce me as a witness to other men. For this reason he now brings me hither, now sends me thither; shews me to mankind, poor, without authority, perhaps sick; sends me to Gyarus, leads me to prison; not that he hates me. Heaven forbid. For who hates the best of his servants? Nor that he neglects me: for he neglects not any one of the smallest things: but to exercise me and make use of me as a witness to others. Appointed to such a service do I still care where I am or with whom, or what is said of me, instead of being wholly

wholly attentive to God, to his orders and commands? †

This is the language of a Greek Philosopher. But certainly the spirit it breathes, and the sentiments it inspires, are christian and divine. And may we not say that every thing which reason dictates as duty is truly divine? The apostle tells us that "when the gentiles which have not the law," the written law of God, "do by nature" or reason "the things contained in the law; these having not the law are a law unto themselves, which shew the work of the law written in their hearts: their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another." ‡ They shew the law, that is, the law of God, written in their hearts. Does not this warrant us to say that when reason cries, this is the way, walk ye in it, it is the voice of him that made us?

But I proceed to the third thing mentioned as necessary in the business of

I 3

religion,

† Epictetus Arriani, Wolfii edit. liber iii. c. xxiv. p. 341.

‡ Rom. ii. 14, 15.

religion, which is that we apply to it with a zeal and assiduity proportioned to the importance and difficulty of it. Now the importance of this business is plainly such as to take all importance and consequence from every thing else. Nothing else in comparison can deserve the least thought or reflection. Our most serious employments, unless made subordinate and subservient to this, are at best but more solemn trifles. But the necessity of this care and diligence will appear farther from the reluctance we often find within ourselves, and the difficulties we meet with from without in the prosecution of this great end.

One might think it at first sight impossible for men not to attend to a concern in which all their interests are for ever involved ; that a matter confessed to be of infinite importance should not be ever uppermost in their thoughts. Yet is it found in experience that this attention itself is no necessary concomitant of reason ; and that men in their senses frequently live in an habitual neglect and seeming forgetfulness of all that is most worthy and important in life. The reason

son is, that this attention requires some abstraction of thought from the objects that surround us, and the cares and follies that every day return upon us; which is somewhat painful to minds unaccustomed to these spiritual exercises. And though the object before us be to the eye of reason of the first magnitude, yet the passions and imagination are not so agreeably moved and gratified by it, as by those objects which are more familiar to them, and more within their reach and perception. And when this attention is gained, and conviction sets us seriously to work in the business before us, there are still often difficulties to be surmounted, in forming the virtuous character in ourselves. Though the ways of virtue be pleasure and peace, yet when men have thoughtlessly contracted bad habits, it is extremely difficult to reform the mind; to put off the old man with those affections and lusts that have taken deep root within him; in the scripture language, to create a new heart, and renew a right spirit within us. And if we are not always upon our guard against sin, if we are not indeed constantly exerting our en-

deavours to grow in grace, and in the practice of all that is good, the best of us will be in danger of falling from virtue. But if this work be difficult the importance makes it indispensable and necessary. And if this be difficult is not this the condition of human nature throughout? Is not labour the price of every thing that is valuable and praise worthy among men? Does not every art and accomplishment of life require infinite pains to perfect us in it? And shall the art of living, the very business of life, require none? Were it in our power to enter into life without keeping the commandments, could we meanly absolve ourselves from this duty? Can we ask heaven for nothing? Or while we accept this boon at his hands, revolt from the service of him who is the author of eternal salvation to us.

Let me then here ask, and desire every one of you to ask himself in your retirement, what have you done to inherit eternal life? Have you ever seriously inquired what true religion is, in what the business of it consists; what character,

character, temper, and habit of mind it requires? You have had the scriptures in your hands from your infancy, have been taught these things by your parents, masters, and ministers, have had the best means of improving in every virtue. What use then have you made of these advantages: or have you, like the wicked and slothful servant, buried all these talents in the earth: suffered the good principles, which by the diligence of others, have been instilled into your minds, to lie dormant there: and at last to be obliterated and forgotten? Have you laid out any plan or rule of life to guard your temper, your passions and appetites, from the fallies of extravagance, and from the temptations to which they are exposed; and for confirming in you the necessary habits of godliness and sobriety? Have you seriously inquired whether the course of life in which you are engaged, be such as is consistent with the strictest virtue, and with the attention we owe to our highest interest, the service of God? Certainly if our whole time and thought were employed, our whole industry and attention of mind were exerted in this
great

great work, our labour would not be ill directed; we could not do more in the service of God than he deserves from us. But our gracious master does not exact these severities at our hands. He knoweth whereof we are made, remembereth that we are but men; and permits us to attend to the calls and concerns of this life. Attention to our spiritual duties will be no hindrance to our temporal interests. Nor will industry and diligence in our proper sphere and business be the least impediment to our growth in virtue. They are indeed a material part of virtue, one of the best securities against vice of every kind; and when exerted with fidelity and integrity, as a duty we owe to God and society, have a right to be considered as a part of that diligence which I have been recommending from the text. To be good citizens and good neighbours, to be useful to our country, our family, and friends, is a necessary part of the christian character. The principles of religion and virtue are no burden to the mind or body. We may bear them about with us wherever we go, whatever business we are engaged in; without

out weariness or fainting. On the contrary they will be the most faithful companions to us in every circumstance of life. They will make every task and honest toil a pleasure, will add to the joy of prosperity, and be our best support in adversity.

But if the business of life and its truest pleasures, be consistent with the service of God, we must renounce all such business and pleasure as takes off our attention, and diverts our affections from the things above. We must pursue the things of this life, not with the keenness and ardour of avarice and ambition; but as far as possible with the indifference of a guest that tarrieth but a day; remembering that the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal: but, not remembering only, but imprinting this deeply in the mind; revolving and viewing it attentively there; till it has taken hold of the heart and affections; till we feel something of that holy fervour, that zeal and assiduity in the service of God, and in the prosecution of our duty, which is recommended
in

in the text. This is to live, and this is no more than to live, like men. We cannot for a moment consult that reason which makes us men, without seeing the folly of giving our affections to the things of the world, and being cold and lifeless where our everlasting interest is at stake.

Let this then be our resolution, to live by reason and religion, and to enter immediately upon the service of God. And let this be our rule, to use all the helps which religion, reason and experience afford us, to keep this resolution awake; and to engage and quicken our active powers in the work of the Lord: that being steadfast and immoveable in it, our labour may not be in vain in the Lord.

S E R M O N VII.

2 KINGS XX. 1.

*Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die
and not live.*

TH E S E words are a message which God sent by his prophet to King Hezekiah: the occasion of which is so well known that I shall not need to enlarge upon it. My design is to call upon you to apply the admonition of the text, every one to his own person: for we have all the same interest in it which this King of Judah had. We want not a prophet to foretell that we shall die. We have the fullest conviction, and a sort of ocular demonstration of this, in the make and frame of our own bodies, in the natural progress of all animal beings, from maturity to decay, and in the generations that are
fleeing

fleeing away in succession before our eyes. But surely no sagacity could ever foresee the general inattention paid to this truth; that an event so certain and important, so decisive of all our interests, should be so generally overlooked in our designs and dispositions through life. It is certainly of all things that concern us, the most necessary to attend to this. But what can be said to excite attention to truths, so known and familiar, that no one ever doubted of them? Who wants to be told that the rising sun will set—that all flesh is as grass, and all the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field? Who can bear to be taught with an air of wisdom, what every one has already learned? Certainly so. But if however this be true, we must take for truth all the consequences that attend it. We may see and acknowledge a fact, and shut our eyes to the truths that are connected with it. We may assent to a general truth, without inquiring what personal concern we have in it; how far our interests are affected by it; and without making it a principle of action or conduct. Now though the truths I am speaking of are
 universally

universally known, yet that men pay little attention to them in their practice, and are too little concerned about their consequences, I am sure many of us want to be told. The living know that they shall die. But it is a fact, as certain, that many live as if their inward thought was that they should continue for ever, and their abiding from generation to generation.

To prevent this fatal inadvertence, this inconsistency in our character and conduct, I shall endeavour to shew the necessity above all things of attending to this great truth, and of making it a leading principle in our lives and actions: and secondly to shew it's force as a motive for setting not only our temporal affairs but our consciences and our spiritual accounts in order; agreeably to the admonition in the text.

And that we may together with the folly and danger of not attending to this principle, see the better how to guard against this inattention, it will perhaps be of use to inquire into the
causes

causes and circumstances which chiefly contribute to it.

Now one probable reason why this matter is observed with so little attention, is, I think, it's being familiar and habitual to us. This truth was never new to us. We learned it before we were capable of reasoning or reflecting upon it. It has ever wanted the force of novelty and surprize, to attract our attention; and therefore the impressions it makes on us, unless quickened by reflection, or some accidents, which point it's force more directly towards us, are but faint and languid. Our inattention itself grows by time into a habit, and becomes in some fort natural to us. Just as the marvellous works of creation having been always before our eyes, excite no curiosity; and we often pass through life without reflecting on the infinite power and skill, which appear in every part of them. This world of wonders, which fills the contemplative mind with rapture and astonishment, is no spectacle of admiration or praise to the multitude, who see the year return, day and

and night, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, succeed each other, without lifting up their hands or their thoughts to heaven, and without reading any footsteps of the eternal power and godhead in his works.

Were this event, which we are contemplating, unknown and unheard of, and the sentence in the text on a sudden pronounced upon us; thou shalt die and not live; it is easy to conceive with what consternation it would seize us: but we are not at all less concerned in this event, nor is it at all less certain than if it was this instant made known to us, by a voice from heaven. If then this truth be the same, and all its consequences will as certainly follow, why should we not act upon it with the same steadiness, zeal and assiduity as we should if we were instantly called upon from heaven to do it.—If in proportion as these objects are thought distant, they lose their power of affecting us, we must supply this defect by our own care and application. As our imagination grows indolent, and unapt to be moved through custom and ha-

K

bitude,

bitude, we must call up our reason, to represent the greatness and importance of the subject; which, when well presented to the mind, will not fail to raise and engage it's attention.

A second cause, which averts our attention in this case is, that the subject itself is unpleasing and painful. The pains of death, the skeleton and the grave are disagreeable images to present to the mind; and the thought of returning to dust, of being soon lost and forgotten, very mortifying to the pride of man. But these owe, in great part, their terrors to the imagination only, which a little reason and reflection will effectually dissipate. The last moments of life are usually those in which we suffer least: and if sickness and sorrow do not sooner reconcile us; the decrepitude and miseries of age are more than enough to contrast with all the horrors of death.

But alas, this is not thinking of death, as christians or as men. Were every thing to end with this life, there would be nothing in death or even in
life

life that would deserve much thought or attention. But reason and revelation assure us, that death is only the entrance into another life; a life which shall never have an end; and in which we shall be for ever happy or miserable, according to our lives and conduct here — that it is appointed unto men, once to die, but after that the judgment — that God will judge every man according to the works done in the body — that there is no wisdom, knowledge or device in the grave, whither we are going, but as death leaves us, judgment will find us. — It is this which gives all it's importance to life itself; and makes death the most interesting period in our whole existence. It is the stroke which decides our fate for ever; which finishes our character, and terminates our hopes; which leaves us no farther room for repentance or amendment, or for purchasing to ourselves a better degree in the kingdom of heaven.

This is to die: to give in our account of the talents with which we have been intrusted; and to take our

final allotment, either with the good and faithful servants of God, or with the wicked and slothful. In this view, death is indeed the king of terrors to the thoughtless and profligate; to that evil servant who shall say in his heart, my Lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken: verily I say unto you, the Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and shall cut him asunder, and shall appoint him his portion, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

How much then does it import us to have this object frequently in our thoughts, and to form and fashion every part of our lives with a view to it: that we may be able to give up our accounts with joy, and not with grief; that we may be always prepared as men that wait for their Lord! Blessed shall that servant be, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, he shall make him ruler over all his goods. Therefore be ye also ready:

ready: for in an hour, when ye think not, the son of man cometh.

A third cause, which concurs with more force than any of the former, in producing the effect before us, is the early and strong attachment, which we contract to the things of the world. The busy scene in which we live, naturally takes up our thoughts and attention; and it is with difficulty that they are called off to the contemplation of truths, that are speculative; and which we consider as standing at a distance from us. — The senses, imagination, and passions are perpetually crouding the mind with objects of their own: and amidst the noise and tumult of these, the still voice of reason is not easily heard. The objects they present to us are near at hand, and have the advantage of making a livelier impression upon us: and promising immediate pleasure and satisfaction, rob us of all inclination as well as leisure, to attend to objects that are more remote and spiritual. The wants of the body, and the provisions of the animal life, employ many of our active powers; the lust

of the eye, and the pride of life, extend our wishes and pursuits much farther: and where men are less engaged in the cares and business of life, amusement and pleasure are often found as powerful avocations from thought and reflection. This attachment to the world begins as early as life itself: and when it is not restrained by education, for which it is often too powerful, grows every day stronger; till by custom it becomes habitual, and gains the possession of the whole mind. Hence it is, that men of the greatest abstraction of thought, and who have a serious sense of religion upon their minds, often find it difficult to collect their thoughts, and to keep them fixed for any time on spiritual objects. And in others the passions and affections are so absolutely engrossed, and the powers of the mind as it were exhausted, by the concerns of this world, that they become incapable of joining in the common acts of prayer and devotion; and even at the end of a long life, and on the very verge of eternity, are sometimes unable to raise their thoughts and affections to heaven, or to disengage them from temporal

temporal affairs. This I am certain is sometimes the case, even in men of no abandoned character. So dangerous is the habit of inattention to our duty, and of sloth and negligence in our spiritual concerns.

But if reason is given us to be our guide through life; if it is this which makes us men; how unlike to men, how unworthy of our character is it to live wholly by appetite, sense, and passion! And how should we employ this faculty of man, but in the true business, the end and destination of man? A little attention to this subject will shew us the necessity of attending still farther. And we cannot long attend to it, without seeing the folly of attending so much to any thing else. The glittering scenes, which captivate our senses and imagination, will soon be found to be illusion and deceit. The honours and pleasures of life will fade away and vanish into nothing, when we hold up eternity to our view. Thus the thought of our latter end, if we will but give it at first a fair entertainment in the mind, will soon secure itself a

good possession there; and will break the force of that enchantment, by which the God of this world hath blinded our eyes that we should not see.

We have in the history of the Maccabees, a striking picture of human greatness; carried perhaps to the highest pitch that fortune, honour, power, and pleasure have ever raised it. "It came to pass, that after Alexander, the son of Philip, the Macedonian, who came out of the land of Chittim, had smitten Darius, King of the Persians and Medes; that he reigned in his stead; the first over Greece: and made many wars, and won many strong holds, and slew the kings of the earth; and went through to the ends of the earth; and took spoils of many nations: in so much that the earth was quiet before him. Whereupon he was exalted, and his heart was lifted up. And he gathered a mighty strong host, and ruled over countries and nations, and kings, who became tributaries unto him. And after these things he fell sick: and perceived that he should die."

This

This is the sum of the proud account at last. He perceived that he should die. What now were the reflections of this mighty conqueror, this pretended son of Ammon, at this interesting period? After making the earth desolate, and turning it upside down; of what avail were his numerous diadems, his pageant trophies and titles, and all the honours, divine and human, which he had acquired? Would you know the end of these men, the votaries of pride, ambition and pleasure, and what their thoughts are at the last? It is well described in the book of Wisdom; surely we have erred from the way of truth, the light of righteousness hath not shined unto us, and the sun of righteousness rose not upon us; we wearied ourselves in the way of wickedness and destruction, yea we have gone through desarts where there lay no way, but as for the way of the Lord we have not known it. What hath pride profited us, and what good hath riches with our vaunting brought us? All these things are passed away like a shadow, and as a post that hasteth by; and as a ship that passeth over the waves
of

of the water, which when it is gone by, the trace thereof cannot be found, neither the path way of the keel in the waves; or like as when an arrow is shot at a mark, it parteth the air which immediately cometh together again, so that one cannot know where it went through: even so we, in like manner, as soon as we were born, began to draw to our end, and had no sign of virtue to shew, but were consumed in our own wickedness. For the hope of the ungodly is like dust that is blown away with the wind; like a thin froth that is driven away by the storm; like as the smoke which is driven here and there with a tempest, and passeth away as the remembrance of a guest that tarrieth but a day. But the righteous liveth for evermore, his reward also is with the Lord, and the care of him with the most high. Therefore shall he receive a glorious kingdom, and a beautiful crown from the Lord's hand; for with his right hand shall he cover him, and with his arm shall he protect him. This is he whom we had some time in derision, and a proverb of reproach. We fools counted his life madness, and his

his end to be without honour. How is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints!

If then this be the different end of good and bad men, if this alternative be certain and unavoidable, what can be said farther to aggravate the folly and danger of not attending to it? You believe that you are formed for eternity, that life and death eternal are set before you, that death will consign you to one of these states unalterably, and can you suffer any rest in your souls till you have chosen and secured the better part? Can we be free from care and anxiety, where all our hopes, our highest expectations are at stake? Can we see without horror the danger of perishing for ever: we that are so apprehensive and alarmed at every little incident that threatens our temporal interest, our fortune or our honour? We can bear with patience the severest discipline, and submit to the most painful operations, where our health is in danger: but think every thing a trouble, and a fore burden; every moment too much to spare from our pleasure or repose, when our
eternal

eternal salvation is at stake. Were we assured that in a few years we should be deprived of all our present possessions, and should yet survive the loss of them for a much longer period of time; how careful should we be to provide in the years of plenty, for those of famine; and how inexcusable should we think the prodigal, that wasted those stores which he might lay up, sleeping in ease and security; without reflecting on the years which he must spend in want and misery! Yet how inadequately does this represent the infatuation of those who pass their days secure and undisturbed, without molesting themselves with the inquiry, what part they are to have in the eternity to come: that eternity to which this life however protracted, with all its pleasures, pomps, and vanities, is in proportion literally nothing? Certainly if any thing can awaken us into sense and reason, one, but transient view of this dreadful precipice before us must do it.

But this dreadful precipice is not in view before us; we are yet at a safe distance, and may provide against the danger

danger before we approach it. This I might have mentioned as another illusion, which flatters us in our security, and prevents us from attending to our spiritual interests. But what is this life which stands betwixt us and eternity? How many years or days of it can we call our own? Do we want to be told of the uncertain tenure by which we hold it? *How many are gone before us, who entered upon the year that is past, as full of life and hope as ourselves? And which of us can be sure, that this night his soul shall not be required of him? If then the sentence of the text, and the judgment of God, every moment hang over us; why should we be a moment unprepared? Why should we not instantly apply to the duty inculcated in the text? Set thine house in order; set thy conscience in order; for thou shalt die and not live?

In what this duty consists, I need not take time to explain. It is not ignorance of our duty, but inattention to it, which is the great evil of life.—To set our temporal affairs in order, is a lesson

* This Sermon was preached on New-Year's Day.

lesson which every wise man will draw to himself, from this admonition of the prophet. To settle our spiritual concerns, we must examine impartially our consciences, and turn over the register of our past lives, with a view to correct every thing that is amiss, and to supply every thing that is defective in our religious character.—We must guard ourselves with new resolutions and new rules, against those snares and temptations which have at any time betrayed us into sin. We must put ourselves in such a course of life as may best lead us on in the practice, and confirm us in the habits of every virtue. And when can we more seasonably apply to these duties, than when we are reminded by the revolution of the year, of the quick advances we are making towards our latter end; and are thus powerfully warned by numbering our days, to apply our hearts unto wisdom.

When we count over another year in the stage of life, it is natural to pause, and review the scenes that we have gone through; to recollect the good and bad that has befallen us in it; the
change

changes that time hath made in our affairs, our persons, and in the world about us; and the marks of gradual decay, which age is perhaps bringing upon us. This then is a proper time to look into the state of our minds, and to inquire whether we have made that use of our time for which it was given us. When we reflect how swiftly the years that are gone over us have past, we shall learn to estimate aright, the shortness of human life; and to improve the little remainder that is perhaps left us, to the best purposes. When we consider the emptiness of all earthly enjoyments, how little we are the better for any honours that we have acquired, any pleasures that we have enjoyed; we shall learn to value aright the pleasures that are before us. We shall say with Solomon, "all that cometh is vanity." We shall look farther for our true happiness, and endeavour to provide for it by a life of piety and virtue. All that is left to us of our past life, all that we can now enjoy or place to our account, is the good that we have done in it. Every thing else is lost, or worse than lost, remembered only by the impressions
of

of guilt; the stain and sting which sin has left behind it. This then will teach us to employ the remainder of our time so as to enjoy it, so as to make it indeed our own, so as that it may never be lost, but be of eternal benefit to us. When we reflect on the numbers that every year hath swept away of our friends and acquaintance, and find it almost a wonder that we are still left to survive them: this uncertainty of our abode here will lead us naturally to ask ourselves, how are we prepared to enter into another life? Had it been our lot to have been called before, could we have met death with chearfulness, with a comfortable hope that we should be able to stand in the judgment, or should we fatally have been surprised in an evil hour, in an hour when we looked not for it, and with the guilt of many unrepented sins upon us? This then should teach us to make haste, and flee from the wrath to come, not to rest till we have reformed our lives, and secured a good hope in the future life.

Let this day then be the date of your
new resolutions, your new counsels,
your

your new life. And let me press it earnestly upon you, as an important duty ; not only to improve every particular opportunity of communing with your own hearts ; but to allot regularly some portion of time for this purpose ; for reviewing the past, and looking forward to the future. This will keep your attention to every other duty awake ; you will thus be armed against all temptation : and in the language of the gospel, will have your loins girded about, and your lights burning, like men that wait for their Lord. And blessed shall that servant be, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find thus watching.

1871
The first of the year
was a very dry one
and the crops were
very poor. The
winter was also
very dry and the
crops were very
poor. The spring
was also very dry
and the crops were
very poor. The
summer was also
very dry and the
crops were very
poor. The autumn
was also very dry
and the crops were
very poor. The
winter was also
very dry and the
crops were very
poor. The spring
was also very dry
and the crops were
very poor. The
summer was also
very dry and the
crops were very
poor. The autumn
was also very dry
and the crops were
very poor. The
winter was also
very dry and the
crops were very
poor.

The first of the year
was a very dry one
and the crops were
very poor. The
winter was also
very dry and the
crops were very
poor. The spring
was also very dry
and the crops were
very poor. The
summer was also
very dry and the
crops were very
poor. The autumn
was also very dry
and the crops were
very poor. The
winter was also
very dry and the
crops were very
poor. The spring
was also very dry
and the crops were
very poor. The
summer was also
very dry and the
crops were very
poor. The autumn
was also very dry
and the crops were
very poor. The
winter was also
very dry and the
crops were very
poor.

S E R M O N VIII.

I THESSALONIANS V. 23.

*The very God of peace sanctify you wholly:
and I pray God your whole spirit, and
soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto
the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

THESE words are a pious wish or prayer for the Thessalonians, which St. Paul leaves with them at the close of his epistle, as a token of his zeal and concern for them; and at the same time as an admonition to them of the necessity of that perfect holiness, which he here prays God to work in them, in order to prepare them for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. They teach us, that no ordinary degree of virtue is sufficient to secure us against the terrors of that day; that we should endeavour to be entirely holy and blameless before God; and to this end that

L

we

we should look up to heaven for a blessing on our religious endeavours; and beg God's grace to sanctify, and perfect us in holiness.

I shall, in treating upon these words, endeavour

First, to shew the nature and character of that holiness, which is expressed in the text by being sanctified wholly, and by being blameless in our whole spirit, soul, and body.

I shall secondly shew the necessity of this perfect holiness, to qualify us for the promises of the gospel; or in the language of the text, to prepare us for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And shall lastly inquire how far we may expect this blessing from our prayers to God; or for what reasons it is made a duty in us to beg of heaven to sanctify and preserve us blameless.

First I am to shew the nature and character of that holiness which is described

scribed in the text, by being sanctified wholly ; and what is meant by being blameless in our whole spirit, soul, and body.

To be sanctified, or made holy, signifies in its first sense to be separate from common use ; from every thing common or unclean. Thus places and persons, dedicated to the immediate service of God, are in scripture called holy. In this sense the temple is said to sanctify the gold ; and the altar to sanctify the gift. Hence, by an easy figure, when applied to moral subjects, it signifies to keep ourselves unspotted from the world ; to be free from all moral pollution or defilement. All sin is supposed in scripture to carry pollution and impurity along with it. From within, says our blessed Saviour, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemies, pride*. All these evil things come from within, and defile the man. They who forsake these sins, and keep separate from them, are said to be sanctified. Such were

L 2

some

* Matt. xv. 19.

some of you, saith the apostle to the Corinthians; but ye are washed; but ye are sanctified; but ye are justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the spirit of our God*. To be sanctified wholly, is to be intirely free; to be removed at a great distance from all sin. It is, to be blameless in our whole spirit, soul, and body. In which last words, if the apostle be supposed to speak with a strict philosophical propriety, we must understand by the spirit, the faculty of reason, or the power by which we distinguish right from wrong, and truth from error; and by the soul, the principle of life and sense; the seat of the passions and animal affections. And then by sanctifying the spirit, or keeping it blameless, is meant having the mind well principled with religious knowledge; filled with reverence for truth and virtue; and with a due sense of its duty to God: by the soul, having all the passions confined within due bounds, and directed to their true objects: by the body—having the senses mortified and subdued, and all our words and actions conformed,

* 1 Cor. vi. 11.

formed, to the laws of temperance and purity.

We find this three-fold distinction of the human system into the mind, or governing principle, the animal part or the principle of life and motion, and the body, very common among the ancient philosophers. But there is, I think, no occasion for supposing it in the apostle's thoughts in this place. It is more natural to believe that he meant, without distinguishing accurately betwixt soul and spirit, in general, by each of these terms, that the whole inward man, his thoughts and affections, were to be sanctified or kept free from all impurity. It is usual with the best writers, when they would express any thing with more than ordinary earnestness and concern, to repeat the same thing in different words, to add weight and emphasis to what they say. When our Saviour tells us that we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, with all our strength; the same thing is meant by each of these expressions. But this repetition adds a suitable so-

lemnity to this first and great commandment. And the meaning of the whole is much the same with that of St. Paul in the text: which is, that we should make the love of God and virtue, the ruling principle of our lives; and consecrate all the powers, and faculties of the mind to his service.

This in general is meant by being sanctified wholly, and keeping our whole spirit, soul, and body blameless. How far this is a duty expected from us, we shall see more particularly under my second head; in which I proposed to shew the necessity of this perfect holiness, to qualify us for the promises of the gospel; or in the words of the text, to prepare us for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is an ardor and force in the apostle's words, which sufficiently shews his sense of the importance of what he here wishes to the Thessalonians. The last, and highest good which he could possibly wish them was, that they might be approved at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; and to this end he

he prays that they might be found sanctified, and wholly blameless in that day: plainly implying that it were in vain to wish them one of these without the other: as St. Peter more directly intimates in the like words: Wherefore, dearly beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him without spot and blameless*. We find in the epistles of St. Paul many the like expressions of pious concern for his disciples, in which this high degree of sanctity, and innocence is thus indirectly but strongly inculcated. † This I pray, saith he to the Philippians, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge, and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere, and without offence till the day of Christ: being filled with all the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God. To the Corinthians, I thank my God saith he always on your behalf, for the grace which is given you by Jesus Christ: that in every thing ye are enriched by him in all utterance and in all knowledge;

L 4

* 2 Pet. iii. 14.

† Phil. i. 9—12.

ledge; so that ye come behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

There is something very nobly affectionate in this pious care, and concern of the apostle for his christian disciples. They are a strong proof at once of the conviction he had upon his mind of the truth of the religion he taught, and of the purity and perfection required by it.

The necessity of holiness in general, to recommend us to the favour of God, is taught us in numberless places of scripture. We are told, that without it, no man shall see the Lord. "This, saith the apostle, is the will of God;" this is eminently his will, or a summary and compendium of the whole will of God, "even your sanctification†." And that nothing less than the highest degree and perfection of holiness is required from christians, we are

* 1 Cor. i. 8.

† 1 Theff. iv. 3.

are as plainly told. * “ Having these promises” saith St. Paul to the Corinthians, “ let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit; perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” † “ He hath chosen us,” saith he, “ that we should be holy; and without blame before him.” And again to the Philip-
 pians; ‡ “ That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.” So St. Peter, § “ As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation and godliness.” || “ Be diligent that ye may be found of him without spot and blameless.” So that the language of the text is every where the language of the scriptures; and to be perfectly holy and blameless in our whole spirit, soul, and body, or to abstain from all manner of sin, in thought and will, as well as in the outward action, is a common duty required of all christians.

This,

* 2 Cor. vii. 1. † Ephes. i. 4. ‡ Phil. ii. 15.
 § 1 Pet. i. 15. || 2 Pet. iii. 14.

This, in the ears of many, will sound harsh and severe. It will be objected, that perfection, or absolute purity, is not to be expected in this life. Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin? The scripture testifies, as well as experience, that "in many things we offend all;" and expressly assures us that "if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." In this sense there is none good, save God; none holy or blameless, none righteous, no not one.

To this it must be answered, that perfection is here to be understood in a comparative and qualified sense. It is such a perfection as is proportioned to our nature and strength. Every being is then perfect in its kind, when it has the perfections proper to its state and condition. The perfection required of christians, is the perfection of men, and not of angels. But then let it be remembered, that it is not the perfection of mere natural men, who are ignorant of the will
of

of God, and unassisted by the light of revelation; but of those who are blest with the light of the gospel, and who have all the means of grace afforded them. It is a perfection worthy of christians: an obedience proportioned to the great advantages they enjoy. It implies the best improvement we can make of the talents committed to our charge; a sincere and earnest endeavour to carry our virtue, and obedience as far as we can. And if we are sincere in these endeavours, this purity of mind and intention will sanctify our imperfect virtue, and will be accepted instead of an absolute unfinning obedience; agreeably to the declaration of the apostle; If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not*.

This then is, in the christian construction, to be holy or blameless. In this sense, Zacharias and his wife Elisabeth, are said to have walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless. But there are some characteristics of this sincerity or perfect

* 2 Cor. viii. 12.

perfect obedience, which it may be proper here to lay down, as rules to assist us in judging, when we may hope to be accounted holy and blameless before God.

First, it is essential and necessary to this character, that our obedience, as to the subject of it, be perfect or universal in it's extent; comprehending all the branches of our duty without exception. It is not enough to perform some duties, which are perhaps more easy and agreeable in practice, and to abstain from some vices, to which we have little or no temptation. We must be ready to sacrifice our most darling inclinations: must resign our whole will and affections to our duty, before we can be sanctified wholly. The life of a true christian is not a compound of virtue and vice, varying ever betwixt sin and godliness; but goes on in a constant uniform attention to duty. It is indeed attended, even at the best, with many failings of ignorance and infirmity; but with all habits of sin, with the wilful or deliberate acts of it, it is absolutely inconsistent. It is plainly impossible

impossible that he who is sincere in his endeavours to please God, and to practise his duty in the best manner he can, should at the same time allow himself knowingly and wilfully to transgress it. Hence the apostle tells us, that "he who is born of God," that is, every true christian, every true son of God, "finneth not: he cannot sin," saith he, "because he is born of God*." Whatever zeal, therefore, we may pretend for God and religion, from the exact observance of some duties, if we keep the whole law, and wilfully and presumptuously offend but in one point, we cannot be said to be holy or blameless. This partial obedience will not justify us at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. It will be said of us at last; their heart was not whole with him: neither continued they steadfast in his covenant.

A second characteristic, or token of this perfect obedience is, that we make a constant progress and advancement in the ways of virtue. A mind that is steadily bent upon perfecting itself in holiness, will never be content with the highest

* 1 John iii. 9.

highest degree of virtue it can acquire in this life; will still aspire unto the things that are more excellent; and as there are infinite degrees of virtue and holiness, will be constantly improving in them, and advancing nearer and nearer to perfection. It is a dangerous delusion for men to think themselves so perfect as to want no amendment; and a certain proof that our obedience is not sincere, when we do not exert our endeavours to make it still more perfect.

The Theſſalonians, to whom St. Paul directs this epiſtle, ſeem to have arrived at a conſiderable degree of chriſtian perfection: he very largely commends their ſtedfaſtneſs in the faith, their abundant charity, and boaſts of them as enſamples to other churches. Yet he does not ceaſe to pray for them, that they might abound yet more and more. He ſpeaks of himſelf in another epiſtle, after the great attainments he had made in chriſtian virtue, as ſtill labouring for higher degrees of it; as ſtill conflicting with the powers and temptations of ſin, and ſtruggling for the

the victory. * " Brethren, says he, I count not myself to have apprehended ;" that is, to have already attained perfection : " but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus : " immediately after which he recommends the like zeal and proficiency in duty, as a necessary condition of christian perfection. " Let us therefore, says he, as many as are perfect be thus minded † . " The christian life is a constant progression in virtue. We can never arrive at that point, where we may rest with security ; and say that we have done enough. It is for this reason, to convince us of this truth, that perfection is made our aim ; and that we have the most perfect perfection, if I may so speak, that of the Divinity himself for our model. " Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father which is in heaven is perfect. "

A third condition, necessary to render our obedience accepted, or to make

us

* Phil. iii. 13, 14. † Phil. iii. 15.

us blameless before God; is constancy and perseverance. The apostle prays for the Thessalonians, that they may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ *. It is to no purpose to be sometime sanctified and free from sin, if after we have begun in the spirit we end in the flesh; if after having escaped the pollutions of the world, we are again entangled therein, and overcome †. When we relapse into sin, all the fruits of our former virtue are lost: we are fallen from grace. ‡ When the righteous, saith the prophet, turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth; all his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned; in his trespasses that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die. We may indeed, by repentance, be renewed again in the spirit of our minds, and by a double diligence for the future, recover that degree of virtue which we have lost: but it is necessary that we be found at last with the habits of holiness

* 1 Thess. v. 23. † 2 Pet. ii. 20. ‡ Ezek. xviii. 24.

holiness and virtue strongly rooted in us, in order to be justified before God, or accepted as blameless in his sight: agreeably to the sayings of our blessed Saviour. He that endureth to the end shall be saved*; and, be faithful unto death, and thou shalt receive a crown of life†.

A fourth characteristic by which we may judge of the sincerity or perfection of our obedience, is a constant practice of all those means, which religion prescribes for the improvement of our virtue. We may distinguish betwixt religion itself, and the end for which it was intended. The end of religion is to promote the practice of piety, charity and universal virtue among men. Religion itself is a system of precepts, doctrines, and institutions, tending to this end. In the moral precepts of it we are taught what we ought to be; in the ordinances and instituted duties, how to become such as we ought. In the one we are taught, that the man of God must be perfect; in the other, he is furnished unto all good works. So that religion may be considered as an insti-

M

tution

* Matt. x. 22.

† Rev. ii. 10.

tution wholly designed to teach us the most perfect virtue, and to enable us to practise it in the most perfect manner.

To this one end all its doctrines as well as precepts, all the ritual as well as moral duties prescribed by it, tend. It is a foundation, wide and solid, to build a superstructure of the most perfect and sublime virtue upon. He therefore that would attain to christian perfection, must build upon christian principles, or must go the way to it which christianity directs; must diligently hear and read the word of God; attend to the examples, exhortations, promises and threatenings, which it sets before us; must join in those acts of prayer and praise to God, which it prescribes; and constantly attend the sacred ordinances of his church.

By a due use of these means of grace, we shall be enabled to grow in virtue; to advance from strength to strength; and to go on to perfection. This intercourse with heavenly things will wean us from the cares and pleasures of the world,

world, and is necessary to spiritualize our affections, and sanctify our hearts. The man therefore that is sincere in his endeavours after virtue, will make the most of these instrumental duties of religion: and where men live in an habitual neglect of these, in a contempt of the worship or word of God, of his sabbaths or his sacraments, there is too much reason to fear that they have not the end of religion so much at heart as they ought. It is certain they must fall short of that perfect character which the text describes. And this leads me to the last thing I proposed,

Which was to enquire how far we may expect the blessing in the text from our prayers to God; or for what reasons it is made a duty in us to beg of heaven to sanctify and preserve us blameless.

As all the powers and faculties we enjoy, the continuance of them every moment, and the opportunity of exerting them, are the gift of God; it is a kind of natural expression of our concern for the success of any thing we

undertake, to pray to God for his assistance and concurrence with our endeavours. This, therefore, would serve to justify our praying in the apostle's form, that God would sanctify us wholly, tho' his immediate interposition were not necessary to effect this. But we are expressly taught in scripture that God will, to the natural powers that he hath endowed us with, add still further supplies of his grace and strength to those who faithfully ask it. If any man lack wisdom, saith St. James, let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him*. If ye being evil, saith our blessed Saviour, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly father give the holy spirit to them that ask him†. Here then is the noblest encouragement that can be offered to our duty, a never failing source of power and goodness to apply to for aid and assistance in our religious endeavours for succour and support, under all difficulties and temptations. We no longer shall wonder at the exalted pitch of virtue which our religion requires

* James i. 5.

† Matt. vii. 11.

quires from us, we no longer can complain of our own weakness and inability, when we are assured that God will enable us both to will and to do of his good and pleasure; that he will send us grace to help in time of need.

This then is a just ground for our praying to God, that he would assist our weak endeavours, and for making it a constant part of our petitions, that he would help us to sanctify our whole spirit, soul, and body. But we must not rely on this extraordinary assistance so far as to omit the use of our own endeavours. Since it is these endeavours, which in concurrence with our prayers, must entitle us to it. If we misemploy the talents which God has already put into our hands, we must not expect more to be committed to our trust. On the contrary, we are assured that instead of more being given to us, he will take away even that which we have. And whatever measure of this extraordinary grace is conferred upon us, we may be assured that it does not invincibly determine us to good, or, without our own

labour, produce the fruits of righteousness in us; it is only some farther powers, abilities, or opportunities granted to us, the improvement of which is still left to our own care and industry. We must first then make the best use we can of the natural powers, the ordinary means of grace which God has vouchsafed to us: and we may then come with boldness to the throne of grace, and depend upon his promises for such farther supplies of the spirit as he sees needful for us; for he is faithful, saith the apostle, in the words following the text, who hath called us, who also will do it.

Let us above all things in considering the words of the text, attend to the weight of duty which it lays upon us; that exalted virtue which it requires from us. Let us enquire diligently whether we are indeed sanctified wholly, and prepared to stand blameless in our whole spirit, soul, and body, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us try our virtue by the rules above-mentioned, whether it be a steady, uniform principle,
equally

equally and universally influencing all our actions, whether it be fixed upon a sure foundation, immoveable, and like to persevere to the end. Whether we are constantly improving in good habits, and getting by degrees the better of those imperfections, which hang about our nature; and whether to this end we are diligent in our attendance upon religious duties, and in using all the means of grace which are afforded us. Happy will it be for those servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find so doing. They shall be presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. But if we are defective in any of these points, let us not presume to think ourselves so perfect as we ought to be. Let us resolve instantly upon a change and amendment of life. remembering that we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and that nothing less than a real purity of heart and mind will be sufficient to justify and acquit us there. If we are sincere in our resolutions of amendment, we may yet, through repentance and the mercy of God, be sanctified. We may

yet be cleansed. We may yet be justified, as the apostle speaks of the Corinthians. We may yet, through the grace of God, have our hearts established unblameable in holiness before God, even our father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, with all his saints*.

• 1 Theff. iii. 13.

S E R M O N IX.

I CORINTHIANS xiii. 4.

Charity suffereth long, and is kind.

THIS chapter is a divine panegyric upon the noblest of christian virtues, charity; and that eloquence which our apostle has, in most parts of his works, thought fit to disclaim; that the religion he taught might not be thought to stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God, he here, upon this agreeable occasion, has freely indulged, and displayed to the greatest advantage. In the foregoing chapter, St. Paul had made use of many arguments, to induce the Corinthians to mutual love and charity; he reminds them of their relation to each other as men; and as christians, of their yet stricter union under Christ, as their head; and thence infers, that as members of the same body they ought, each

each in their proper place, to minister to the common good. The miraculous gifts of the holy spirit, which were poured upon the first christians, and which were, we know, diversified in several ways, according to the various exigencies of the church, seem to have occasioned some contest among the Corinthian brethren about the degree of preference, which was due to each of these. One had received the gift of tongues, which was at once a glorious testimony to the truth of religion, and a means to diffuse its doctrines more speedily through the world; to another had been given the spirit of prophecy, by which is usually understood in the New Testament, the knowledge of scripture, with a talent of explaining or preaching it to others; to another the working of miracles; to another the gift of healing. There seems, therefore, to have arisen some contention among those who were endowed with these wonderful powers, which should have the first regard and distinction in the church. This unchristian strife for priority, the apostle sets himself throughout that chapter to check and reprove; he tells them that the manifestation of the spirit was given to every

every man to profit withal; that these miraculous virtues were not designed for a vain shew and ostentation, but for the profit and benefit of the whole church; that as members of the same body, they had their several offices assigned them; different indeed, as those of the hand and foot in the natural body, but all equally necessary likewise, and useful in their proper place and province. That on this account, as there is no schism or breach in the natural system, but the wants of the whole are faithfully supplied by every member in its turn; so likewise in the church, the several members of it should be mutually assisting to each other; should consider themselves as having one common interest; and have the same care one for another. The importance of this peace and concord among themselves, he observes in the last verse of that chapter; "ye contend, says he, which are the best gifts," for so I think the words are best rendered, and not as they are in the common translation, "covet earnestly the best gifts;" but "ye contend earnestly which are the best gifts; but I shew unto you a yet more excellent way." This way,
he

he proceeds to tell us, in a strain of the truest eloquence, is charity. "Tho' I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." He then begins with the words of the text, in a sort of triumph, to describe the several properties of this great virtue; at the same time justifying in the amplest manner, the preference which he had given it, by shewing the many graces and perfections that are included in it. "Charity suffereth long and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all

all things." It is this admirable description of charity, which I design the present discourse as a comment upon. To which I shall afterwards subjoin, if necessary, some few remarks, to recommend farther to your practice this more excellent way.

First, I am to explain the several properties, which are here reckoned up, of this great virtue of charity. The apostle having his eye throughout this description, on the disputes and contentions which had happened in the christian church, seems for this reason to insist with more earnestness, and to repeat in different words, the duties of meekness and humility; of modesty and candour; designing it as a tacit reproof of the Corinthians, for their violation in these instances, of the royal law of love. For this reason he seems to have placed, at the head of this catalogue, forbearance and good nature; charity suffereth long, and is kind.

It is resigned under afflictions, and patient under injuries; is not hasty in retaliating, or rigorous and exact in demanding

manding reparation for injuries received; is not ashamed to pardon or forget a wrong or dishonour done it; but esteems it its glory to pass over a transgression. It is always ready to embrace when offered, and usually the first to make overtures of friendship and reconciliation. It watches every advantage, not of persecuting or oppressing an enemy, but of winning him over to a better mind. It tries all the arts of kindness and good will, to soften his resentment; endeavouring to overcome evil with good. Where its bounty and kindness have been abused, and by the ill returns of ingratitude and injustice, it is forced to withhold its beneficence, it still continues its good wishes; it yet hopes for amendment; and as the divine goodness is described*, waits to be gracious. Where it has in its hands a power to punish the offender, and even public justice demands it, it still strikes with reluctance, and, when it punishes the offence, forgives and pities the offender.

Besides this passive virtue of forbearance, it is likewise industrious and active in

* Isa. xxx. 18.

in doing all the good it can; charity is kind. It abounds in acts of civility and good will; delights in pleasing and obliging others. It is not of a morose and intractable disposition, averse to society, and shunning the converse of mankind; but on the contrary, is gentle and easy to be intreated. It delights in nothing more than in communicating itself, and being useful to the world; and in bearing its part in that agreeable interchange of good offices and civilities, by which society and the order of the world is maintained. It is kindly affectioned towards all men, full of the sentiments of humanity and goodness, and indulges every friendly passion which nature has implanted in our frame. It looks with a tender eye on the miseries and distresses of others, is wakeful to the calls of pity and compassion, and is sensibly touched with a feeling of their afflictions. When an object of distress comes before it, it hastens to his relief; stays not for solicitation or importunity; but even prevents him with the blessings of goodness. In a word, it takes a kind part in the prosperity, and is a fellow sufferer in the adversity of others; and therefore,

therefore, in the next place, it envieth not.

That charity which suffereth long, is already taught to be resigned to providence; is not of a querulous, complaining temper, but is easily content, however moderate its condition. That charity, which is kind, which interests itself with a warm concern in the welfare of others, will be less apt to repine at their superior prosperity or success. As it delights in relieving the wants and ministering to the happiness of others, so it cannot but take a pleasure in seeing those wants more richly supplied by the bounty of heaven. It has learnt to adore the goodness of providence, which imparts itself to all men liberally, and is abundantly shed over all his works: and will be rather thankful for the blessings which it enjoys, than repine at those which it wants. By means of this happy temper, as it extends its own happiness and makes it common to many, so it in return shares in some degree the prosperity of others, and makes their happiness its own, by rejoicing with them that do rejoice.

Charity

Charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly. These words import a modest and inoffensive temper, which arrogates nothing to itself, and derogates nothing from others. It is not easy to separate from each other the christian duties, which in this catalogue are so closely linked together. In the united lustre of so many shining perfections, we cannot well discern, severally and distinctly, the beauties of each. Those which are here mentioned, humility and sobriety of mind and behaviour always go together, and are inseparable from that charity which considers all men as its friends and equals; and which forbids us to entertain any degree of contempt for the meanest of our fellow creatures. He, whose thoughts are taken up in admiring his own fancied perfections, seldom thinks the rest of mankind worth much of his concern; whilst the truly charitable person condescends to the poorest and meanest, and invites to his notice those who most want his compassion and assistance. For this reason, we find the duties of charity and humility frequently

N ly

ly in scripture, placed together, as having a close dependence on each other; "put on, therefore, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind*." "Be ye kindly affectioned one towards another in brotherly love, in honour preferring one another†."

"Charity seeketh not her own;" is not intent only upon its own profit or advantage, but employs much of its thoughts in consulting the good of others; does not make its own will the standard of truth, or its own interest the measure of right and wrong. It looks not only on its own things, but has regard likewise to the things of others. It is far from covetousness, and far from ambition; is not of a fond aspiring humour, projecting schemes of greatness to itself, and pursuing them without any regard to the claims of others. In the competitions in which it may be engaged, it governs itself by the strictest rules of reason and equity; thinks not the worse of any for pursuing an interest which interferes with its own, provided it be carried on with the same modesty

* Col. iii. 12.

† Rom. xii. 10.

modesty and ingenuity which it prescribes to itself; is never willingly the author of contention, but rather will recede from the most equitable pretensions, as far as the rules of prudence and discretion will admit, than be the occasion of strife and debate. Even in the offices of humanity and beneficence, charity seeketh not her own; aims not at her own glory and applause, but terminates her views wholly in procuring the happiness, or relieving the misery of others.

The next ornament of the charitable character, is that of a meek and quiet spirit: it is not easily provoked. As it allows of no degree of revenge, it endeavours in itself to suppress every motion of anger and resentment; and as far as is possible, to live peaceably with all men. Hence it is not to be moved by little injuries or offences; and thus often defeats, in the best manner, the malice of its enemies, by resolutely preserving that tranquility of mind, which they attempt in vain to disturb. Not that the person of this character is more insensible to injuries and ill treatment

than others. The man who has a general good will for mankind, will be himself but too apt to set a value upon the good will and esteem of men, and cannot be unconcerned at the ill returns which, instead of this, he will sometimes meet with; but it is still slow to anger. And when kindled on any worthy occasion, it burns not with violence, but as a lambent flame, is gentle in its effects, and will soon be extinguished. Charity spreads a calm over the mind; which no storms of rage and passion can long interrupt or disturb, the heavenly dove dwells there, in the heart where charity resides; and the peace of God will rest upon it.

Charity thinketh no evil. It is not inclined to think ill of others, but puts the best and most favourable construction upon their words and actions. It does not depreciate their seeming virtues, by ill-natured surmises and indirect insinuations; is not ingenious in finding out motives and designs, which do not appear; but where the actions of men appear fair and commendable, supposes them to arise from the best principles, and

and gives them their due praise. And as it is not of itself disposed to think any evil, so neither will it hastily give credit to it on the representation of others. It will carefully examine the grounds of every relation, before it will believe any thing to the prejudice of its neighbour, and in these instances is often harder put to it, to think well of the tale-bearer, than of the person who is the subject of his censorious remarks.

Charity rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; it takes no unjust advantages, nor triumphs in any success but what is obtained by the most lawful and innocent methods; it is a stranger to artifice and dissimulation; and places its sole strength and security in honesty and truth. It flatters not, nor applauds the vices of others, but sees with a due concern the prevailing corruption of the world, and is never more pleased than when it sees the cause of truth and virtue prosper.

Charity beareth all things; or as the word in the original may be here better translated, it covereth all things; it

draws a veil over the infirmities and defects of others; carefully hides them from sight, and exposes their best side to view. It stands in the way against obloquy and slander; is zealous in vindicating injured innocence, and serves as a shield to it, against the arrows of the bitter tongue. It shews every thing in the best colours, and in the most favourable light, and carefully washes out the stains and aspersions which malice or envy may have cast upon it. And hence perhaps it has been sometimes thought to have the extraordinary prerogative of covering or screening from judgment its own sins. For this interpretation has been generally put upon that text of the apostle; charity shall cover the multitude of sins. The man who is thus ready to overlook and excuse the faults and blemishes of others, shall himself be the more easily forgiven the several failings and little escapes which he may inadvertently have been betrayed into. And if it be too much to ascribe this sovereign power to the charitable temper, it is however certain that this disposition of mind is proper, if not necessary, to qualify us for the pardoning grace

grace of God: agreeably to our Lord's admonition: judge not, and ye shall not be judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again*.

In pursuance of this part of its office, charity, it is said, believeth all things, and hopeth all things; it easily believes every thing to the advantage of others; and where appearances are against it, still hopes for the best. Much of this excellent virtue is made to consist in this kind regard to the character and reputation of our neighbour; and as this is indeed a most valuable part of his property, we cannot be guilty of a greater injustice than in defrauding or robbing him of it: and on the other hand, are never more charitably employed than when we are vindicating it from injuries and abuse. Charity, therefore, will not allow itself to suspect men to be worse than their words and actions plainly declare them. With regard to itself, and to any injuries it may have received, it is willing to believe every thing that can

N 4

be

* Matt. vii. 1, 2,

be pleaded in extenuation of the crime; and if it cannot find reasons wholly to justify the offender, it yet hopeth all things: it suspends its opinion; is willing to hope that some better motive than appears, might give birth to the undesigned injury. But when the conviction is too strong to admit of any doubt, it still endureth all things, which is the last mark of the charitable temper which the apostle has here reckoned up; charity endureth all things. Pity indeed it is, that a person of this excellent disposition should be put to the necessity of enduring any thing from the hands of other men. He who is himself a friend to all, should meet with the returns of love and gratitude from all; should find himself a friend in every one. Yet is this christian temper not always a sanctuary from injustice and oppression, but is sometimes more exposed than any other, to the outrages and violence of wicked men. There are base and insolent minds, which will be encouraged to mischief, when they have hopes of doing it, without a return. Under these circumstances, however provoking, charity still chuses the better part
of

of forbearance and forgiveness. Such is its invincible goodness, that it bears with patience even plain and manifest injuries; and makes no other returns to an open and avowed enemy, than such as are consistent with good will. It suffereth long, and is kind.

Thus are we returned at last to the point from whence we at first set out. The two ends of this golden chain are, we see, linked to each other; and form a circle, which comprehends in it every thing that is most amiable and praiseworthy in human nature.

Having thus gone through the apostle's excellent description of charity, I proposed to have further recommended to your practice this more excellent way, by shewing, after our apostle, the other reasons which he gives in this chapter, for his preference of this virtue to all other christian graces. Charity, he tells us, never faileth; that the other gifts of the spirit, which they contended so earnestly about, were but of temporary duration, and should continue but a short time in the church; but this was to be
still

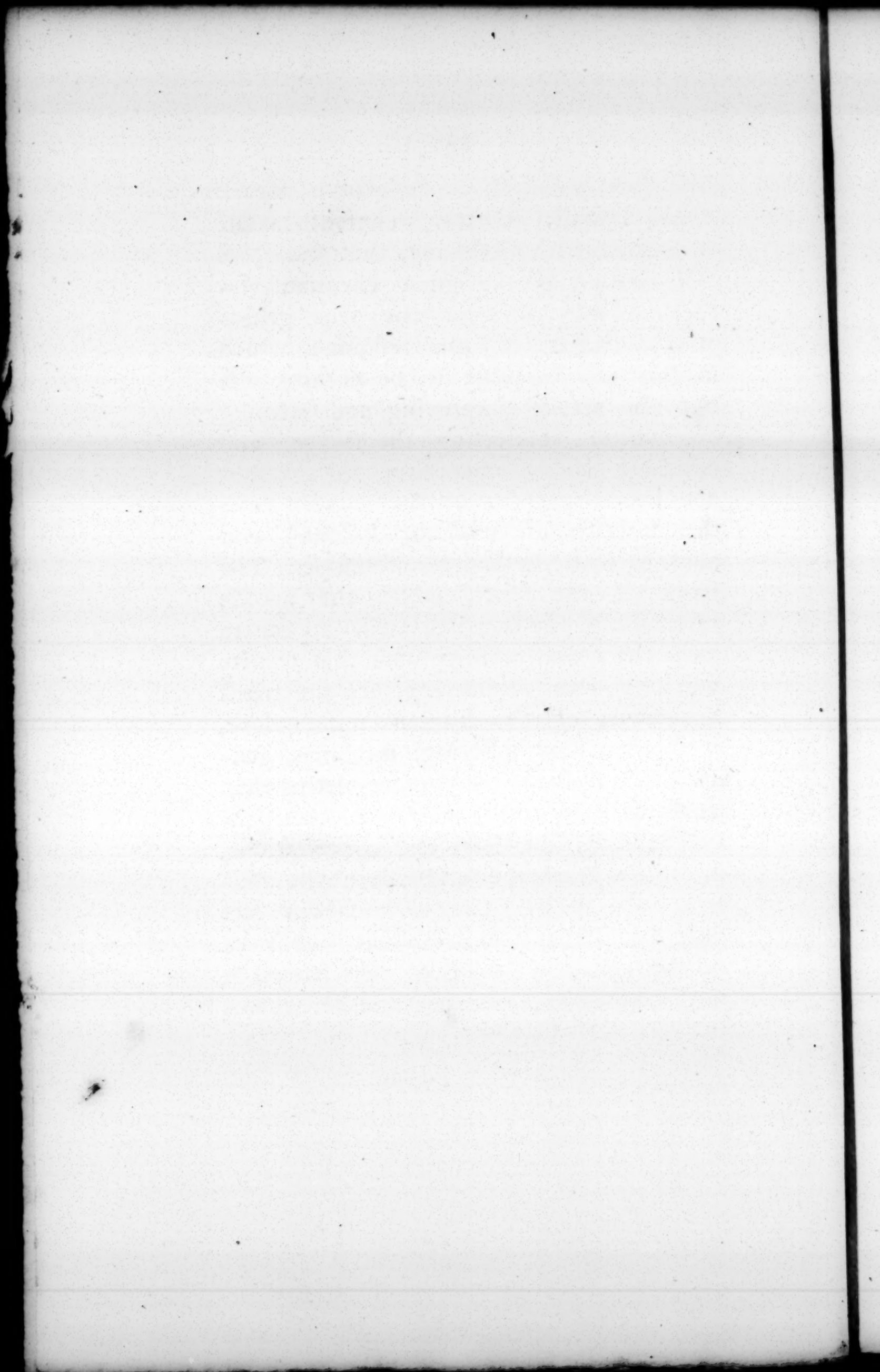
still the chief duty of christians, and the distinguishing badge of their communion to the end of the world: further, that this virtue, as it is the fairest image of the divine perfection in this life, so shall it be translated into heaven, and still survive in the next: when hope shall terminate in fruition, and faith be lost in conviction.

I might likewise have observed the weight and force, derived from the personal character of St. Paul, on this and all his exhortations to charity. He had, by a warmth of temper and a mistaken zeal, been himself betrayed, so far as to become a persecutor, and injurious. Zealous for his own opinions, he thought it his duty to bear a strong hatred to those who were not of the same party; and persecuted those of the contrary way unto death. This furious spirit, he therefore, every where in his epistles, disclaims and condemns; and recommends the contrary virtues of meekness and forbearance, modesty and candour, with the greater earnestness, from a deep sense of his own breach of duty in these instances.

But

But I shall, however, content myself at present, with observing, that from this full account of the great christian virtue, we may discover the true genius and character of our religion: which in this view appears to be nothing else but the art of improving and refining our nature; correcting the savage, and polishing and humanizing the rugged and brutal passions of the mind. It is the severity of wisdom, softened and adorned with the charms of temper. The fruits of the spirit, which the apostle reckons up, and which will appear to have the nearest affinity with that charity we have been considering, are the truest ornaments of the human mind; love, joy, peace, long suffering, meekness, gentleness, goodness, temperance; let us then cultivate in ourselves these christian graces, and in our lives and conversations, mutually commend and adorn the religion of Christ. Let us put our feet into her fetters, and submit our neck to her chains; so shall her fetters be a strong defence for us, and her chains a robe of glory.*

* Ecclus. vi. 24, 29,



S E R M O N X.

LUKE xxii. 19.

This do in remembrance of me.

MY design is, from these words, to go through a plain account of the sacrament of the Lord's supper. This is a duty incumbent upon all christians, and consequently must be level to the understanding of all; and therefore, however speculative men may have differed in their opinions about it, and have made it obscure by mixing refinements of their own along with it, I shall venture to suppose the scripture doctrine concerning it, to be plain and intelligible.

To lay this in the clearest manner before you, I shall first endeavour to explain the thing itself, which is to be done, or the outward action and solemnity which is here enjoined—do this.

Secondly,

Secondly, The manner of doing it, or the application of mind, with which it is directed to be done;—do this in remembrance of me; after which we shall easily perceive the ends and purposes for which it was instituted; the duty and obligation of it; and lastly, the qualifications necessary to perform it worthily; which several particulars will take in every thing that we are concerned to enquire after, in relation to this sacrament.

First then, for the solemnity itself, or outward ceremony here enjoined; we must have recourse to the words of the institution itself, which are recorded in the verses preceding and following the text, where we are taught that our Blessed Lord, in the same night that he was betrayed, sitting at supper with his disciples, took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying; take—eat, this is my body, which is given for you, do this, in remembrance of me; likewise, also, the cup after supper, saying; this cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is
shed

shed for you. The same form is repeated with very little variation, by St. Matthew and St. Mark, and by St. Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians.

Our Saviour had, before this, foretold his sufferings and death to his apostles, that he should be crucified and slain, and rise again from the dead; and the same intimation of his approaching death, is conveyed to them in the institution itself, in which it is plainly implied, that his body was to be given for them, as the bread which he gave them was then broken, and his blood to be shed, as the wine was poured out before them; and he commends it as a duty to them, that when they should eat bread, and drink wine, in like manner after his death, they should (as oft as they did it) have him in remembrance.

This construction of the words is extremely plain and easy, but then the sense of them is still left so loose and general, that we can scarce, perhaps, from hence alone, collect with any certainty, whether our Saviour intended hereby, any religious rite to be publickly
observed

observed and continued in his church, as hath been generally understood from them; and if we had no other grounds for it, there are many, I doubt not, who would think this an insufficient foundation to build any such observance upon. They would be apt to tell us, that this was only part of a solemn and pathetic farewell, which our Lord was now taking of his disciples, in which he recommends it to them, to preserve his memory among them, and to take every occasion of calling to mind their late gracious master, who had when living, given every proof of his affection, and was now going to die for them. It would be said, that this form of our Lord's, is of the same kind with that precept of the apostle, whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God: by which, as no more is meant, than that men should habitually intend the glory of God, in all their actions, even the most indifferent and common; so by this of our Saviour was meant only, that they should habitually, in every part and circumstance of life, preserve a pious memory of him their Lord and Master.

It

It will therefore be expected, before the common interpretation of this passage is admitted, that we should produce some other reasons to support it. And first, this might be collected as highly probable, from the time and occasion when our Lord instituted this rite. We learn from the verse foregoing the text, that our Lord was now celebrating with his disciples, a religious festival of the Jews, they were eating the passover, which was appointed by God, to be observed yearly, in commemoration of the deliverance of the children of Israel out of Egypt; and we are informed by the Jewish writers, that it was a custom universally observed at the Paschal feast, for the master of the house to take bread, and bless it, and breaking, to distribute it to the rest, and in like manner to bless the wine, and to distribute the cup of blessing, as it was then called, to those that sat with him. Our Saviour, therefore, seems here to have adopted this religious rite, into his new religion, only transferring the use of the elements, (which he retained) from their first intention, and applying them to a nobler

O

meaning,

meaning, to be perpetual emblems of his body and blood, which were to be given and shed for the remission of sins, of which they were very proper and significant representations.

This affords a probable ground for interpreting the words of our Lord, as intending a rite of publick and perpetual use in his church, to be observed of all christian believers. But we have farther the justness of this interpretation infallibly proved to us, by the practice of the apostles, and first followers of our Lord. We find in the Acts of the apostles, that they with the other disciples, constantly observed this duty in their religious assemblies, which is there expressed by breaking of bread; they are said to continue daily in the Temple, and to break bread from house to house, (that is) in the several houses where they held their religious meetings; on the first day of the week, the disciples are said to be assembled together, to break bread, and again they continued stedfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayer.

From

From the first epistle to the Corinthians, we learn that St. Paul had given directions to that church, to observe this as an act of christian worship, and he severely rebukes them for not performing it with that reverence and solemnity which they ought.

The time and occasion upon which these words were spoken, and the subsequent practice of the apostles, fully shew that our Lord intended, by this institution, a religious duty, to be publicly observed by all the members of his church, in which they are to set apart bread and wine, to represent his body and blood, and to eat and drink them in remembrance of him.

The next enquiry will be, what that application of mind is, with which this action is directed to be performed, or what is meant by, or implied in, this remembrance of our Blessed Saviour ;—do this in remembrance of me.

By remembering him in this publick and solemn manner, is certainly meant

more than a transient or general recollection of him. It must be such a remembrance of him, as answers some ends of piety or religion, by promoting his honour whom we commemorate, or by conducing to some religious or moral improvement in ourselves; to remember him, doubtless implies, a distinct attention, to the several characters and relations, which he bears to us, a present sense of the honour and reverence, which are due to him, under these characters, and of the obligations, which are brought upon us, by the relations which we mutually bear to him.

Let us then consider what the principal of these characters are. The great end for which our Lord came into the world, was to redeem lost mankind, to deliver them from that state of sin and ignorance, into which they were almost universally sunk, and to reconcile them to God.

In order to this, the first office which he took upon him, was that of a teacher or lawgiver. He taught men by his precepts and example, a perfect rule of
duty,

duty, how to serve God in an acceptable manner, upon what terms they should be accepted of him, and how to recover his divine favour, when forfeited by their disobedience. This was the business of our Saviour's life. But another great part which he bore in our redemption, was by his death. In consequence of which, as a voluntary sacrifice offered by himself, he is represented as the mediator between God and man: as the one mediator by whom God chose to reconcile the world unto himself; and for his sake, his all-perfect obedience, testified by his sufferings and death, to grant pardon and peace, and the promise of an eternal inheritance to all that repent and forsake their sins. As under the Jewish law, God was pleased to appoint sacrifices, as a condition of his forgiving sins, in order to vindicate the honour of his laws, and to remind men of the detestation which he bore to sin, and the penalty due to it; so in the new covenant the voluntary oblation which our Saviour Christ made in the devotement of himself to a life of sufferings, and to a cruel death for our sakes, is considered as a sacrifice;

which God was pleased to accept in lieu of all other sacrifices and sin offerings; and to point it out as a monument through all generations, of his readiness to forgive sin, and to accept the returning sinner, upon his repentance and renewed obedience.

The two great characters then, under which our Lord is represented in scripture, are those of a lawgiver and mediator: and under these we are more particularly concerned to represent him to ourselves, when we thus commemorate him, with such sentiments as a religious attention to them will naturally inspire,

First then as a lawgiver, to commemorate him under this character, implies the paying him that honour and homage of the mind, which the dignity of his person, and the divine power and authority with which he was invested, require from us. It implies a conviction of the wisdom, equity, and goodness of all his laws, and consequently an entire acquiescence in the authority of them, a sense of our obligations to obey them,

them, and a grateful acknowledgment of our happiness, in being governed by them. In this view, our commemorating Christ, is a publick declaration, to what master, and what religion we belong; it is in effect, a renewal or confirmation of our baptismal vow, a solemn recollection within ourselves, and an open profession to all others, that we are the disciples of Christ, his subjects, and servants, and sworn votaries to that most holy religion, which he hath taught us in his gospel.

This is indeed indirectly implied in every act of christian worship; we cannot confess our sins to God, or ask pardon for them; we cannot profess our hopes in his promises, or deprecate his anger, without virtually acknowledging the authority of his laws, as the rule of our duty, and the conditions of his favour and displeasure. But it is more directly signified and expressed in our thus jointly commemorating Christ as our Lord and lawgiver; accordingly our church hath taught us, in the celebration of this solemnity, to dedicate ourselves in a solemn manner to his ser-

vice; to offer up ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto God.

The next great character, under which we are to commemorate our Lord, is that of a mediator; and this indeed seems to be the thing primarily intended in this sacrament; since the symbols themselves, the bread and wine here used, do immediately present the memory of his sufferings to the mind; our Bleffed Lord having, in the institution itself, appointed them to represent his body which was to be sacrificed, and his blood to be shed, for the remission of sins; and St. Paul speaks of it, as the principal distinction of this rite, to shew forth the Lord's death till he come.

It must be reckoned amongst the mysteries of God's moral government, which we cannot fully comprehend, his appointment of a mediator, and making the death of Christ the means of conveying his pardoning grace to mankind. But though we cannot see all the reasons of this divine dispensation, yet we see enough to adore the wisdom and goodness

ness of God, in chusing this as an expedient to reconcile his hatred of sin, with his mercy to sinners, and to preserve entire the authority of his laws, while he opened a way for the penitent sinner to recover his divine favour. The scriptures when they speak of this great transaction, every where magnify it, as the highest instance of God's mercy and loving kindness to men, that he "spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all*," that "he so loved the world, as to give his only begotten son, that all who believe on him, might have everlasting life†." They represent it, as the surest ground of our hope and security, in the goodness of God. "He that spared not his own son, but gave him for us, how shall he not also, together with him, freely give us all things?"

The first thing, therefore, which I shall mention, as implied in the commemoration of Christ, as our mediator, is a devout thankfulness to God for his wonderful mercy, in thus reconciling the world to himself; all the mercies of God, all the promises of the gospel, are re-
presented

* Rom. viii. 32.

† John iii. 16.

presented to us in scripture, as procured and conveyed to us through the mediation of Christ; and the rights of his mediation are as clearly founded on the sufferings he underwent for our sake; we can never, therefore, more properly offer up our thanks for those means of grace, and hopes of glory, which are set before us, than when we commemorate those sufferings of our Blessed Lord, by which they were purchased and secured to us.

This sacrament hath, therefore, from the earliest ages of the church, obtained the name of the Eucharist, which signifies giving of thanks, as it is designed to be more eminently an act of praise and thanksgiving to our creator and redeemer. To that sacrifice of our Lord, which we there commemorate, we must add our own sacrifice of thanks and praise; we must bring with us to this sacred solemnity, a disposition of mind, suited to those strains of devout praise and adoration, in which the church hath taught us, in her office for this occasion, to express our sense of the divine mercy and goodness. We cannot raise too high
within

within us, the devout sentiments of gratitude and affection, when we go up to celebrate the adorable goodness of our redeemer; "who hath washed us from our sins in his own blood *," and "is become the author of eternal salvation, to all them that obey him †."

Secondly, our commemoration of Christ's sufferings and death, implies in it, a lively sense of the evil and demerit of sin: the remission of which, and the consequent tender of life and immortality was granted to, and merited only by the death of Christ, and by his obedience, which was "made perfect through sufferings ‡." A principal reason why sacrifices were appointed under the law, seems to be (as I have above said) to admonish men of the penalty they incurred by sin, and to preserve in their minds a continual awe of the justice of God, and the purity of his divine nature. And when the use of sacrifices was superseded by the one oblation of himself, which Christ offered in our stead; a perpetual memorial of this great sacrifice, seems, for this reason, among others, to have been

* Rev. i. 5. † Heb. v. 9. ‡ Heb. ii. 10. v. 9.

been appointed, that men might be continually reminded of the great price which was paid for their redemption; that, reflecting on the supreme dignity of the person who suffered death for all men, they may be warned of the heinous nature of sin, and of God's invincible hatred to it; that they may be humbled under a sense of their own guilt, and of the punishment which they have justly deserved for their offences; and at the same time be confirmed in their resolutions of forsaking them, and of gaining an interest in the promises of God, and in the mediation of Christ, by a better obedience for the future.

Thirdly, this commemoration of Christ, is a proper expression of our pious hope, and trust in the goodness of God, through the mediation of his son. The blood of Christ was as the seal of the new covenant, by which all the promises of God are secured to us, upon the condition of our obedience to his gospel. "This cup, saith our Lord, is the new covenant in my blood." Whenever, therefore, this cup is offered to us, in representation of our Saviour's blood, that
was

was shed for the remission of sins ; it is a token and assurance given us on God's part, that he will graciously fulfill the promises made to us, if we perform the conditions required on our part ; and our receiving it as such, is an actual profession of our belief in his truth, and our faith in his promises.

This religious rite, is not the making a new covenant with God, nor hath it indeed, properly speaking, any thing of the nature of a covenant in it. But it is a monument and memorial of the covenant once made, betwixt him and all mankind, in the gospel of Christ, and into which we are admitted by baptism. And as our partaking of it, is on our part, a declaration of our continuing true to this covenant, so it may be understood as a witness or token on his, of his having accepted the mediation of our Saviour, and of his readiness to receive the returning sinner, according to the terms of his gospel.

This sacrament, therefore, naturally inspires us with a trust and confidence in the goodness of God, and this we express

express in partaking of it, by resigning as it were, all our interests into his hands, renouncing all merit in ourselves; and placing our hopes wholly in his mercy, through the merits of Christ, our mediator; who is able to save to the uttermost, all them that come unto God through him.

These are the principal things implied in commemorating our Saviour in the sacrament of his supper; It is first, acknowledging Christ for our Lord and lawgiver; and as such, professing all obedience to his commands.

Secondly, it is acknowledging him for our mediator; and as an expression of this acknowledgment, First, offering up the tribute of our thanks and praise to God, for his mercy, thus exemplified in the work of our redemption; and repaying with the best of our love and services, that debt of gratitude and obedience which we owe to his son. Secondly, professing our sense and conviction of the heinous nature and consequences of sin: to deliver us from which, and to assure eternal life to the penitent believer,

believer, the son of God made his life a sacrifice, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross. Thirdly, our pious trust and confidence in the goodness of God, through the mediation of Christ.

But there is yet another view, under which the apostle hath represented this sacrament to us, which is that of a common bond of union among christians, a token and declaration of their mutual agreement, with their love and charity to each other. "The cup of blessing, saith he, which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many, are all one bread, and one body*." This communion, or common participation of the same bread and wine, the apostle would have remind us of our being united in one body, under Christ our common head; that as fellow members, we might have the same care one for another. The same figure is often used in scripture, as a motive to excite christians to brotherly love. To
the

* 1 Cor. x. 16, 17.

the common ties of humanity, by which nature hath united us together, religion hath added a more sacred bond of alliance, by teaching us to consider ourselves as brethren of the same divine family, heirs of the same promises, and members of the same body; and as this holy sacrament is a declaration of this union, a solemn profession that "we have all one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all*;" so it must be understood, as a testimony and expression of that mutual concern for each other, that harmony of mind and sentiment, that communion of love and charity which ought to appear conspicuously in the members of the same religious society; and which is indeed the best proof of our being really christians; thoroughly incorporated into the body, and animated with the spirit of Christ; agreeably to the apostle's character of such society, whether one member suffers, all the members should suffer with it, or one member be honoured, all the members should rejoice with it†.

And now from this short account of the meaning of this sacrament, we shall
be

* Ephes. iv. 5.

† 1 Cor. xii. 26.

be able, readily, to collect the general end and design for which it was instituted, and the particular benefits which we may expect to receive thereby, together with the duty and obligation of it, and the qualifications necessary to receive it worthily; but these I must leave for the present to your own reflections, and shall conclude with a remark which offers itself naturally from what hath been said.

And that is, that whatever of mystery and obscurity, there may be in the doctrine of our redemption, by the death of Christ, there is in this institution (which is designed as a commemoration of his sufferings) nothing very difficult to be understood.

The whole doctrine is, as we have seen, very plain and intelligible; the words of the institution are simple and easy; and the ceremony itself, as easy in the meaning and intention of it, as it is in the performance. We may, therefore, justly wonder at the strange doctrines which have been built upon it, and at the many disputes which have
P arisen,

arisen, and still subsist in the church concerning it. The monstrous opinions of the Romish church, I would willingly for the sake of our common christianity, pass over in silence; since the very mention of such absurdities, is apt to expose religion itself, though very unjustly, to the scorn of its enemies; and one cannot but think it beneath any reasonable man, seriously to confute such errors as are visible and palpable to the senses of mankind. Who would not disdain, to be put upon proving, that our Blessed Saviour, at the time when he blessed the bread before his disciples, did not hold his own body in his hand? And that in every celebration of the Lord's Supper, the whole body of Christ is not really in every particle of the bread, and his blood in every particle of the wine, which the communicants receive? Yet these are the opinions which that church hath made a part of her creed: and which, it is to be lamented, end not in speculation only, but lead to the greatest enormities in practice; for as they conceive the divine, as well as human nature of Christ, to take the place of the elements at the consecration of them,

them, they pay the same idolatrous adoration to their host, that they do to the images of our Blessed Saviour and his Virgin Mother, or rather indeed the same higher worship which they pay to God himself.

And all this amazing system, they pretend to found on the words of the institution, in which our Saviour says of the bread, this is my body, and of the cup, this is my blood; from whence they would understand (not that the body and blood of Christ are incorporated into the bread and wine, for this article of their faith implies still farther, viz.) that the bread and wine are converted or transubstantiated into the body and blood of Christ; so that they retain no longer any of the qualities common to bread and wine, but are absolutely and properly the very body and blood of Christ, which was crucified on the cross. But leaving these contradictions, which no power of omnipotence can reconcile, to be confuted by themselves; and by that plain interpretation of the words, which, as we have seen, offers itself at first sight to every intelligent reader;

It will be proper to observe farther, in order to keep this sacred institution free from every degree of superstition, that there is in the celebration of this sacrament, no mysterious change of any kind; no mystical power or virtue conveyed to the elements; but that they remain after consecration in themselves the same bread and wine as before. It is true, they are different to the receiver; he considers them in a different light, as set apart for a religious use, to represent the body and blood of Christ; and therefore he receives them not as common bread and wine, but eats and drinks them in remembrance of Christ. The change that is made, is not in the elements themselves, but in the mind of the receiver. And this is all that is meant by that relative holiness which any thing is said to receive by consecration. Holiness is plainly a moral attribute, and cannot properly be ascribed to any other than moral subjects. Wherever, therefore, we speak of things inanimate as holy, we mean always that they are the instruments to moral agents of performing some religious acts, or occasions of bringing

ing holy and religious thoughts into their minds ; or of exciting some reverence and respect towards that Being, who alone in the true and proper sense is holy.

When we say that the seventh day is hallowed, or consecrated by God, we mean that it is set apart by him for religious exercises, or it is made a duty in us to employ that time in acts of religion and piety ; but it will not be said that time itself is holy, or that one part of duration is more holy than another. In like manner, when any place is dedicated, as is highly decent and proper, with some solemnity, to religious uses, there is no change made in the place itself or the buildings that surround it ; nor is God more present there than he was before, and than he is always in every part of space : but it now becomes a duty in us to be more particularly mindful of his presence there ; and to shew it by every mark of reverence and respect that we can pay before him. And so when the elements in the sacrament are blessed or consecrated, there is no change made in the elements themselves ; they are only considered in a different

ferent manner by us; they are set apart to a very sacred use; namely, to represent the body and blood of our Lord: from hence they may be considered as having that kind of imaginary relation to Christ, which there is betwixt a sign and the thing signified: the bread and wine are the sign, and the body and blood of Christ are the things signified.

This relation betwixt them, which is only an idea in the mind of the communicant, is an occasion of his calling to mind the sufferings of our Lord. From henceforth it becomes a duty in him, when he views the sign, to contemplate the thing signified; when he eats and drinks the bread and wine, to commemorate the body and blood of Christ. They are therefore so far only, and no farther, holy, as they minister occasion to holy and religious thoughts; and serve to the ends of holiness and religion.

I shall not trouble you with any nice enquiries, how far this sacrament may be considered as a sacrifice, or a feast upon a sacrifice; how far it has the proper nature of a covenant, and whether there

there be any extraordinary presence of our Saviour in it. I shall, however, give you my own sentiments. From what hath been said, you may if you please, make the following conclusions to yourselves, which I have not time at present to consider at large.

First, it is no sacrifice, or properly a feast upon a sacrifice, but only a commemoration of that great sacrifice, which Christ once made, who by one offering hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

Secondly, it is no new covenant, since there is no new promise made by it on God's part, nor any new engagements entered into on ours; but only a memorial of the death of Christ; by which the everlasting covenant betwixt God and man, was sealed and perfected; and into which covenant we are admitted once for all, by our first profession of the christian religion.

Thirdly, there is no corporeal or other presence of our Lord, besides what he hath assured us of, at all other times,

when we meet together in his name; namely, that he is in the midst of us to hear our prayers; nor is he in any other sense present in the communion, than he is in the sacrament of baptism.

Upon the whole, our own part of this duty, all that is practical in it, is extremely plain and easy; and therefore we need not enter into such enquiries concerning it, as are meerly speculative; if we take care to perform our own duty worthily, we shall not fail to partake of all the blessings and benefits belonging to it; what these are I shall take the next occasion of considering.

S E R M O N XI.

LUKE XXii. 19.

This do in remembrance of me.

HAVING taken a general view of the nature of the Lord's supper, and seen what is implied in that religious remembrance of Christ, which is enjoined in the text; we are next to enquire into the ends and reasons for which this sacrament was ordained, and what are the benefits which are derived to the church from the observance of it. These we are to look for in the moral effects of it on the mind, or their tendency to promote and strengthen the piety and virtue of those who observe it; for this is the end of all religion, to lead men to the practice of universal righteousness, and to make them perfect in every good word and work. The grace of God, saith the apostle, hath appeared,

appeared, teaching us, that denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; and as this is the declared end of religion, we might presume the same is the intention of all the ordinances, and instituted duties of it; and accordingly we shall find, upon enquiry, that they all of them in fact eminently conduce to this end. The institution of the sabbath, is visibly one principal means of keeping a sense of religion alive in the minds of men, and of improving them in it, by exercising their piety and devotion. In the sacrament of baptism, it is of great use to have men solemnly advertised of the nature of their christian duty, of the purity and perfection of that religion which they begin to profess; that they may not flatter themselves with false hopes in the mercy of God, but be warned betimes of the necessity of obedience, and the danger of sin. In the holy communion, all the motives of religion are brought into our view, and in the most sensible and powerful manner imprinted on the mind.

The

The ordinances of the christian religion are therefore to be considered as a kind of spiritual discipline and œconomy, by which men are trained up to virtue, by which habits of piety and godliness are formed in the mind, and the man of God is made perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. In the present condition of human nature, men are so taken up with sensible objects, so immersed in the cares of life, that if left to themselves, they would attend very little to spiritual and religious truths. It is, therefore, a wise condescension in God Almighty, to call men off from the pursuits of sense, to lead them to the contemplation of the great objects of religion, and by bringing these often before us, to root the impression of them deep in the mind.

The usefulness and expediency of revelation itself, may be, in a great measure, resolved into this principle. The great lines of our duty to God and our neighbour, might perhaps discover themselves to an attentive enquirer, by the light of reason only; but amidst the affairs and
concerns

concerns of life, few men would find the leisure, and still fewer would have any inclination to engage in such enquiries, and when discovered, such speculative truths would make but a feeble impression on the mind; something more sensible, more awakening, seems necessary to engage the attention of thoughtless mankind; truth must speak to their eyes and ears before they will hearken to it. For this reason God sent his Son into the world to give his sanction to virtue, and to stamp his authority on it in a sensible and visible manner; and to keep these impressions still alive and fresh in our minds, he hath, by the appointments of his religion, obliged us frequently to recollect the great doctrines and duties of it, together with the necessity of believing and practising them, that these truths may sink into our hearts, and not lie dormant there, but become active principles of obedience in us.

Whoever considers what it is to become truly virtuous and religious, will readily acknowledge the wisdom of this provision for our spiritual growth and nourishment; habits of virtue are not
to

to be formed but by slow degrees, and repeated exercise. It is a great mistake to think we can be on a sudden, as good and as virtuous as we please, we must, by frequent recollection, strengthen our faith and hope, we must renew our resolutions of obedience, and be at some expence of thought and application, to give security to our virtue, and to make any considerable advances in the religious life.

This then, I shall lay down as the general end and design of this sacrament; To promote the practice of piety and virtue among christians;—To engage our attention to the precepts of religion;—and to give them their due weight and influence on the mind. In what manner this religious institution is particularly calculated to answer these ends, and how we are so to apply it, as to derive these benefits to ourselves, will easily appear from the view which we have already taken of it. The commemoration of our Blessed Lord, under whatever character or relation we represent him to ourselves, carries in it some affecting motive to a religious and holy life.

If

If we consider him as the great law-giver of mankind, which I mentioned as the first character in which it is natural to commemorate him; if we consider him as a divine prophet come from God to teach men their duty;—this will necessarily fill us with the highest reverence and attention to all his laws, it will effectually strengthen and confirm our resolutions of obedience, by convincing us both of the reasonableness and necessity of it;—it will give us the highest idea of the dignity and importance of virtue, to consider that it was the work of the Son of God himself, to plant it in the world, and that he condescended not only to teach it by his precepts, but to adorn it by his example. If farther we reflect under this head, on the great advantages we enjoy in being thus taught of God; how happily we are distinguished from a great part of the world, who still live in ignorance of his revealed will; this will kindle an holy zeal in us, to distinguish ourselves by a suitable eminence in piety and virtue, and to walk worthy of that holy vocation wherewith we are called.

Secondly,

Secondly, when we commemorate him in his other great character of mediator, if we consider first the gracious methods by which God hath brought about our redemption;—his love to mankind, in sending his Son into the world, will naturally excite our gratitude, and engage the more generous affections of the heart in his service; the love of God, which is the great principle of obedience, will take deep root in us, in proportion as we contemplate this great act of his mercy; and doth not the love of Christ constrain us, when we reflect on the labours and sufferings which he underwent for our sakes? Are we not glad to embrace every occasion of shewing by our obedience our love to his name? Doth not every difficulty in our duty seem easy to us? And all we can do too little in his service? Are we not prepared to give up every passion and interest a sacrifice to him, and ready in the pious resolutions of our heart to cry out in the same devout strain with the apostle; I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh,

flesh, I live by the faith of the son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me?

Or secondly, if we consider the sacrifice of Christ, which we here commemorate, in another view, as a monument of God's hatred against sin, what can strike us with a stronger conviction of the danger of sin, and more effectually deter us from it, than the reflection that the blood of Christ was, in the wisdom of God's government, thought necessary to expiate it. A sense of the divine purity thus affectingly represented to the mind, will be a powerful means to keep us pure, even in mind and thought, from all corrupt inclinations, and will render sin in our sight (as the apostle expresses it) exceeding sinful.

Again thirdly, do we want to have our hope and trust in the goodness of God, assured to and confirmed in us? What can more effectually answer this intention than this sacrament? Which as I have observed to you, is an express token and declaration on God's part, of his acceptance of our Saviour's mediation,

tion, and of his readiness to receive the returning sinner upon his repentance and renewed obedience. This consideration will give life and spirit to our religious endeavours, and banish all despair and diffidence from our breasts. Who is he (saith the apostle) that condemneth? it is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even on the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Thus the commemoration of the sacrifice of the death of Christ, is every way adapted to promote the interests of piety and virtue; it gives the most encouraging hopes to the returning sinner, and carries the most awakening terrors into the breast of the impenitent; it is a strong consolation to the one, to have an advocate with the father, and to be assured that he may come with boldness to the throne of grace; to the other, it is matter of dread and horror, to reflect on the purity and justice of God, and that there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, if he slight the offers of mercy in his gospel.

Lastly, when we consider this sacrament as a profession of our common christi-
Q
nity,

nity, as a declaration of our being united in one common religion, under Christ our head, what can more powerfully engage us to mutual love and charity, than this spiritual communion with, this sacred relation to each other? How do all the little interests of this life, which divide men from each other, vanish into nothing and disappear, when we consider (what this solemnity naturally suggests to us) that we are engaged in a society which is never to have an end, that we are designed to maintain a communion with each other, a communion of love and charity, not only with each other, not only in this present life, but (as the apostle hath opened the great prospect to us) with the whole church of God in the heavenly Jerusalem, with the general assembly of the first born, with the spirits of just men made perfect, with Jesus himself, the mediator of the new covenant, and with God the judge of all, in his eternal kingdom in heaven!* Indeed, in whatever light we consider this sacrament, it includes in it some special motive to charity and love. It is impossible for us in any manner, how superficial so-

ever,

* Heb. xii. 22.

ever, to commemorate our Blessed Lord, without having these virtues before our eyes; he hath left us in his practice the most perfect example of them, that we should follow his steps; and in his doctrines hath made it his peculiar commandment, that we should love one another, as he hath loved us. The pardoning grace of God, which is here represented to us, must excite us to forgive every one his brother his trespasses. His universal love for mankind, shewn in our redemption, should root out every degree of contempt and malice in us, towards those for whom Christ died: and we cannot duly reflect on any part of this dispensation, without feeling more sensibly the force of that exhortation of the apostle; Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

There is yet another important use to be made of this sacrament, which hath been generally overlooked; and that is, that it carries in it an argument of good weight to confirm our faith; I mean not in the promises of the gospel only, of which it is a pledge and assurance, but

in the truth of the christian religion in general, of which it is, I think, no inconsiderable evidence. We learn from the history of the first ages of the church, that the observance of this rite began as early as christianity itself; and are certain that wherever the christian religion hath prevailed in the world, with exception only of some few modern enthusiasts among ourselves, this practice hath universally obtained. The universality then, and primitive antiquity of this custom, amount to a full proof of the truth of this part of the gospel history, and at the same time, of the divine foreknowledge of our Blessed Saviour. It appears from hence, that our Lord foresaw his approaching death, together with the circumstances of it; and that notwithstanding this, he should still have disciples, and a church to commemorate and obey him; all this is indirectly foretold in the institution itself. The circumstances in which our Lord was now situated, if we represent them rightly to our imagination, are extremely affecting, and deserve our particular attention. We see him here before his hour was yet come, voluntarily resigning

resigning or rather devoting himself to death, for the remission of sins. We see him with the prospect of his sufferings and ignominious death immediately before him, still acting with the authority of a teacher come from God, giving laws to his church, a church which was not yet begun, and which, in all human probability, could never have a beginning; the reasonableness yet, and divine wisdom of which provision, however chimerical it might appear to human foresight, the event hath explained and amply justified. This religious observance is therefore still a living witness of the truth of our Saviour's history, a standing monument of his divine foreknowledge and prophetick spirit.

Thus is this holy sacrament every way calculated to serve the interests of religion, to promote the practice of piety and charity and every virtue, to animate our faith and hope, and to strengthen every good resolution, every principle of obedience in us. And we cannot duly partake of it, without growing in grace, and in every good habit.

Q 3

But

But besides these advantages which naturally attend it, we may likewise promise ourselves the blessing of God on our endeavours, and the assistance of his grace to enable us to go on successfully in our christian course.

Every act of obedience will, we are certain, in some degree, recommend us to the favour of God, and draw down his blessings upon us; and he hath, in a peculiar manner, promised the grace of his holy spirit, to those who faithfully ask it. We can never, therefore, more securely rely on these inestimable blessings, never more reasonably expect to be fulfilled with his grace and heavenly benediction, than when we address ourselves to his mercy in the celebration of this sacrament; which is certainly one of the most acceptable instances of obedience we can pay him, and in which we are not only allowed to plead the merits of Christ's sufferings in our behalf, but have the most gracious assurances given us of the efficacy of his mediation, and of our acceptance through him.

In

In what particular manner the supplies of God's holy spirit are conveyed to the mind, the scriptures have no where explained to our curiosity; but this we may presume to say, that they are in this sacrament communicated in the same manner, as they are at all other times, when God sees it necessary for our relief and support; in reward to the obedience, or in answer to the prayers of his faithful servants; and not from any virtue inherent in the elements themselves, or any power that the outward action and ceremony have to work such change in the mind; every opinion of this kind is error and superstition, as I have already had occasion to observe to you.

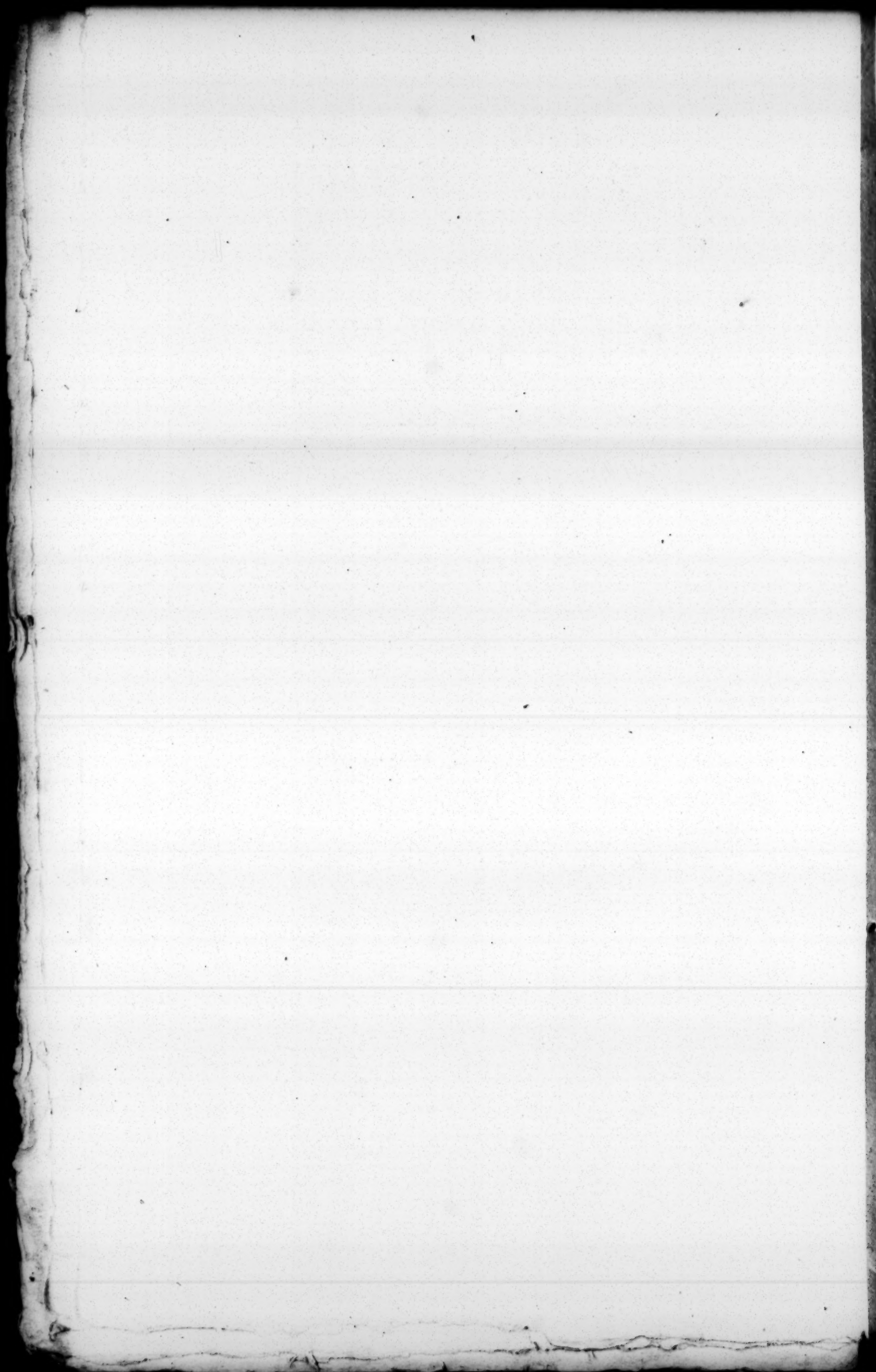
It will now be proper before we dismiss this head, to remark that all the benefits which we have described, as belonging to this sacrament, are such as are implied in the nature of the institution itself; or may be ascribed to it from such general promises as are made to all the duties of religion in common, and not from any particular promise annexed to this ordinance;

nance; for indeed no such promise is any where made to it in scripture.

And this observation will be of great use to prevent our being deceived in our expectations, or building any false hopes and assurances upon it. Men have sometimes out of a mistaken zeal for the honour of this sacrament, thought they could never say too much of it; and have ascribed to it a power and efficacy, which seem quite foreign to the nature of it, and of which the scripture hath not made the least mention. They have even supposed a plenary absolution and pardon for all our sins, to be actually conveyed by it; and this opinion hath, by degrees, crept into many of the treatises upon this subject. But it concerns us before we admit a doctrine of this consequence, to be well convinced of its truth. This is a matter in which we must not flatter or deceive ourselves; if the scriptures have given no ground for this opinion, it will be in vain to build upon the authority of men; and whatever great names may perhaps be brought to support it, we have a right to reply, Who is this
that

that forgiveth sins also? who can forgive
sins but God only?

But as this is a doctrine of some importance, and hath been too generally received, I shall think it worth the while to examine it distinctly, and shall therefore reserve it for some other opportunity, when we may consider it more at large.



S E R M O N XII.

LUKE XXii. 19.

This do in remembrance of me.

WE have seen how admirably calculated the sacrament of the holy communion is to promote the practice of piety and virtue in the world; to strengthen our faith, our hope, and charity; and as far as any single act of worship or obedience can, to procure for us the special grace and assistance of God's holy spirit. But besides these benefits which may be plainly inferred from the nature of this sacrament, or from such promises as are made to it in common with other religious duties; there are certain privileges and mysterious powers claimed to it, which seem to have no such foundation in the nature of the institution itself, and are, I think, but ill supported by any appearances in scripture. Such
in

in particular is that of conferring a pardon, or full remission of all our past sins: which has been asserted by some eminent writers, as belonging to this sacrament.

That our Blessed Saviour suffered for the sins of the world, and that his death was accepted as a sacrifice and atonement for them, hath been already allowed, and explained: and that, therefore, this sacrament, as it is a commemoration of his death and sufferings, may be fitly understood as a monument or memorial of God's mercy to mankind; as designed to give us a comfortable assurance that God is a propitious Being; that he requires no more sacrifices at our hands; but that if we live up to the terms of his gospel, he will fulfill his promises in accepting our sincere obedience, and rewarding it with eternal life: and that if we have failed in our duty, yet if we return to it with all our hearts, and forsake our sins, he will pardon and forgive us. All this is, as I have observed to you at large, significantly represented to us in this sacrament. But that this remission of sins is on the instant conveyed,
and

and the guilt of the sinner done away by his devoutly receiving this sacrament, does by no means appear from all that we have yet seen upon this subject: and is a doctrine which affects so immediately, and applies with such weight and force to our highest and eternal interests, that it must be of the most dangerous consequence to admit it, if false.

It is obvious to think, that the attributing so much to the practice of any one duty, will naturally tend to depreciate and supersede the necessity of the rest. And it will be rating very low the christian character, and the purity and perfection required in it, to suppose that it can be thus suddenly acquired; or when lost, thus suddenly regained. And it must be feared that a general neglect, and inadvertence to duty, will soon succeed, when men have persuaded themselves that they can, by this one act of obedience, make amends for all past deficiencies, and recommend themselves as effectually to the favour of God, as if they had been punctual in the observance of the whole. And though they may, perhaps, think it necessary to bring some good thoughts
and

and pious resolutions along with them, in order to qualify themselves for this pardoning grace of God, it will surely be too much to suppose of the nature of sin, and the punishment due to it, to believe, that with a few days preparation we can become new men, be cleansed from all the impurities contracted by sin, and have a right spirit renewed within us.

Who can say I have made my hands clean, I am pure from my sin, before he has indeed forsaken it, and put off the old man with its affections and lusts? Men cannot, on a sudden, divest themselves of vicious habits, and change them into those of piety, charity, and sobriety, which are the only terms held out to us by the gospel, as necessary to qualify us for acceptance with God. And we are, I am sure, no where warranted in scripture, to expect any such miraculous change to be wrought in us, by the help of this sacrament.

Another consequence from hence is, that there is too much reason to fear that men may rest too securely in a good

good opinion of themselves, while in a state of sin, and be made less apprehensive of the dangerous effects of it.

Those who have taken out their pardon, as they think, by receiving this holy sacrament, will be happy in their present condition; though they are perhaps still under the power of the same vicious habits that they were before; and will thus be betrayed into an indolence and carelessness which, in such circumstances, must be fatal to their virtue. And at the same time they will be more easy under the guilt of any new sins they contract; when they reflect that they have no more to answer for than those which they have committed since they last discharged this duty. Others again will continue in sin with the more satisfaction and security, in the prospect of making, some time or other, upon these easy terms, their peace with God: or perhaps may be so far deluded as to put even this off till the end of their life; in hopes of making up their accounts with God once for all; and reconciling themselves to his favour, by cancelling the sins of a whole life together.

It

It is, I fear, sometimes, upon this mistaken principle, that men are so superstitiously careful to receive this sacrament in time of sickness, and especially at their last hours. The practice of private communion, which the church indulges in such cases, is, I think, free from all exception; and indeed highly just and commendable: as it is at such times highly becoming a christian to give the most solemn testimony he can to the religion which he professes; to declare his conviction of the righteousness and equity of God's laws; to express his thankfulness for the mercy of God in the redemption of the world; and lastly, to declare his charity and good will to mankind. All which, as I have observed to you, is emphatically implied in this solemnity. But there are many such times when it cannot properly, or even decently, be administered. And therefore it should never be understood as a thing of so much necessity as to make the pious christian uneasy under the want of it; or as of so much virtue and significance, as to make the sinner, when he hath no other hopes left, to place any confidence in this. And
indeed

indeed the dangerous consequence of this doctrine appears in no view more conspicuous than when thus applied in these circumstances.

It is certain whatever devout thoughts or pious resolutions are necessary to the worthily receiving this sacrament, sickness almost infallibly brings this preparation along with it. The most profligate sinners are then touched with remorse. When the passions subside, the senses and imagination are silent, and reason is cool and undisturbed; religion, in these circumstances, always triumphs, and how different soever men may have been in their past conduct, all are now found of the same mind; and in the fittest disposition possible for religious exercises. But will it be said, that to all such persons this sacrament, if administered, seals a pardon for their past sins, and restores them to the favour of God? Where is then the necessity of a holy and religious life? and what comfortable conclusions will the libertine draw to himself from this principle? The dangerous uses, therefore, to which this doctrine may be applied, ought to make us suspect the truth of it. And

R

we

we shall find, upon farther enquiry, as I proposed in the second place to shew, that it is contrary both to reason and the general tenour of scripture.

By forgiving of sin, is properly meant, remitting the penalty due to it. All sin is made such by the prohibition of some law. Sin, saith the apostle, is the transgression of the law. And every law is guarded by certain penalties annexed to the breach of it. To forgive then the transgression of any penal law, is the same thing with remitting the penalty due by that law. This is, I think, the only proper and true notion of forgiving sins: nor can we easily form any other distinct idea of it. Let us then enquire whether any such remission as this can be conferred in the holy eucharist. By the terms of the christian covenant, whoever takes upon him the religion of Christ, makes himself a debtor to fulfill the whole christian law: and by the breach of this law, incurs the penalty annexed to it. But this punishment is nothing temporal, or to be inflicted in this life. It is in the next we are to receive the reward of our deeds. And consequently the remission of sins cannot

cannot be actually conferred in this life. We may, indeed, be assured here, and are under certain conditions assured, that the penalty due to our past sins will be forgiven hereafter. And we may, at all times, apply to ourselves the comfort of this promise, as long as we are careful to fulfill the conditions of it. But the effect of this promise cannot be received, or actual remission of sins cannot be conferred, till after this life.

There are, indeed, certain penalties, by the order of nature, annexed to sin in this world. Pain and misery are, in many instances, the natural consequences of it. And it must be allowed, farther, that the providence of God may sometimes interpose in an extraordinary manner, in inflicting temporal judgment upon offenders, when the ends of his government require it. These it is certain may be here remitted. The evils which attend upon vice, may be prevented; or when inflicted, may be removed. And this seems to be all that is meant by that remission of sins, which our Saviour pronounced on the sick of the palsy, in Luke v. 20. "Son, thy sins are forgiven thee." For this bless-

ing seems there to be made equivalent to, and to be explained by that which immediately followed, " Arise, take up thy bed and walk." * But these are not the penalties threatened in scripture, as the proper and adequate punishment for sin. Nor is it a remission of these penalties, or the grant of temporal blessings, which is generally meant by those who assert the power of remission in this sacrament. But indeed

* To heal a disease, and to forgive sins, are synonymous phrases in Hebrew. For this we have the authority of Michaelis, in his introductory Lectures to the SS. of the N. T. p. 144, which is a book that I must recommend to all that would study the SS. carefully.

In Luke viii. 48. ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκε σε, Thy faith hath saved thee; is rendered in our translation, Thy faith hath made the whole.

In that remarkable text of St. James v. 16. ἰξομολογεῖσθε ἀλλήλοις τὰ παραπτώματα, καὶ εὐχεσθε ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων, ὅπως ἰαθῇτε, That ye may be healed. These last words, in the vulgate translation are rendered, *ut remittatur vobis*,—That ye may be forgiven.

When our Saviour healed the cripple at the Pool of Bethesda, he charged him, Sin no more, lest a worse thing happen unto thee.

Not inflicting the penalty of death, and forgiving the sin by which it was incurred, in the case of David, are made equivalent terms in the speech of Nathan. The Lord also hath put away thy sin: thou shalt not die. 2 Sam. xii. 13.

indeed if it were, no such prerogative even as this belongs to it, as far as we can prove from experience, reason, or scripture.

A second sense, in which we may less properly understand forgiveness of sin is, when the party offended does not immediately inflict the penalty, or take the forfeiture of our disobedience; but allows us a longer time to retrieve our past conduct, by a better behaviour for the future. This may be considered as a temporary and conditional forgiveness. And to confer this remission on the sinner implies a promise, or assurance given him, that his sins or transgressions shall, upon the conditions required, be finally forgiven. To apply this to the present case, it is certain by every wilful deliberate transgression of the divine law, we become subject to the penalties threatened by it: and God might immediately, without any imputation on his justice, inflict the punishment, or remove us out of this life to the place of suffering. But it is certain, in fact, that God does not always take such immediate vengeance on sinners, but shews in an eminent manner his long-suffering and forbearance, by allowing them still a space

to repent, a further time of trial and probation. And in such cases he hath further given us the most gracious assurances, that if we make the right use of the time which he gives us, by correcting our bad habits, and improving our good ones, he will hereafter forgive the sins we have committed, or remit the penalty due to them.

This imperfect or conditional forgiveness, is frequently conferred in this life; and as we have good grounds to hope is often made perfect, and crowned with a real and true forgiveness in the world to come. But this present remission is not annexed to the observance of this ordinance, or in any sense conferred by it. To see this more clearly, we must observe that this remission consists of two parts; first, a temporary suspension of the penalty due to sin; and secondly, an assurance given us that upon certain conditions we shall, at last, be wholly forgiven.

As to the first of these, that God does not take immediate vengeance on sinners, but allows them time to work out their repentance. This long-suffering and forbearance

bearance will not, I suppose, ever be ascribed to the virtue of this sacrament. It will not be said that this sacrament will add to our span of life, or prolong our time of trial. This must be left wholly to the mercy of God, or to the natural course of his providence. It is an act of his grace which he hath not annexed, by promise, to the performance of any rite or duty whatever.

Nor, secondly, does this confer on us any title to the conditional promise of forgiveness in another life. For first, this is no new promise made to us at the communion; but is made in general to all christians; into the benefits of which we are admitted at baptism, and which wants not to be confirmed or renewed, but subsists in full force through our whole lives. And secondly, the condition of this promise is, not the receiving the holy communion, but repentance and amendment of life; and consequently this promised mercy can no more be secured to us, by receiving this sacrament only, than by any other single act of worship or obedience.

This doctrine, therefore, is contrary to reason and the nature of the thing. And
it

it will be found, upon enquiry, no less inconsistent with the general tenour of scripture: all the promises of which are made only to holiness and habitual virtue, or after sinning to repentance and amendment of life. Nothing less than this we are taught in numberless places of scripture, will be accepted at God's hand. It is not a few transient occasional acts of duty, nor all the outward reverence and homage we can pay him, that will justify us in his sight. He that doeth righteousness is righteous, says the apostle. Nothing else will make us righteous, or justify us before God. To suppose, therefore, that any one act of religion, with what solemnity soever it be provided for, and with whatever devotion performed; will procure for us the pardon of our sins, and be sufficient to instate us in the favour of God, is to contradict the general meaning of the holy scripture: it is to vacate all those precepts of it, which enjoin us to perfect holiness in the fear of God, to abound in every good word and work, and to be holy in all manner of conversation and godliness.

It may, perhaps, be said in exception to this, that we may, in some instances, by
one

one single act of religion, become intitled to the remission of sins: for that this promise is actually made to baptism. And it is certain that there are several places in scripture in which such promise seems to be implied. But let us then enquire to what this promise amounts. Our Saviour and his disciples were now preaching the gospel to the Jews and Gentiles; and inviting them to make profession of the christian religion. Preaching this gospel is there called repentance and remission of sin. They called upon those that heard them, to repent, and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. The meaning of which is, that if they would repent and forsake their old sins, and make profession of the christian religion, and live agreeably to the rules of this religion; that then all their past sins should be forgiven them. This promise is, we see, conditional; and the condition of it was plainly their renouncing all their bad habits, and entering sincerely and heartily upon a life of christian obedience; which, if they were not careful to perform, we are not to believe that they were at all the better for this baptism, or for the promise made to it. The guilt of their past sins, if they
 did

did not forsake them, doubtless remained still upon them. And as St. Paul says of the circumcision of the Jews, in the like case, that it became uncircumcision; so we may safely assert of such baptism, that as to any virtue or effect it became no baptism. The promise then made to us at baptism, does not, properly speaking, take effect, or the benefits of it are not actually applied to us at the time when we are baptized. They are suspended upon certain conditions, to be performed after baptism, and which we are to continue to perform to our lives' end. There is, therefore, even in baptism, no such present remission conferred, as is contended for in this sacrament. And we shall find, as I proposed in the last place to shew, that this latter opinion has far less appearance in scripture to support it.

In the form of the institution, though repeated four several times by the Evangelists and by St. Paul, there is no such promise expressed or implied. In that related by St. Matthew, mention is made of the remission of sins; and this has been thought by some to countenance this doctrine. The words of our Saviour there
recited

recited are, This cup is the New Testament or covenant in my blood, which is shed for you, and for many, for the remission of sins : in which the doctrine of our redemption, by the death of Christ, is plainly implied. And this doctrine is therefore very proper matter for our devout contemplation, when we receive this sacrament. But it is neither said nor implied, that this remission of sins is conferred on those who receive this sacrament, nor is the receiving it enjoined as the condition of this forgiveness. The holy communion, as it is a commemoration of that sacrifice which Christ made for the sins of the world, may indeed be considered as a testimony and assurance of God's readiness to forgive sinners upon the terms of his gospel. But the like assurance is given us in every part of the New Testament. And it may, therefore, as well be said, that whenever we read these scriptures, or hear the gospel of remission of sins preached to us, we have this remission actually conveyed, as when we receive this sacrament, in which the same is figuratively represented, and more forcibly impressed on the mind.

The

The only remaining text, as I think, in which this doctrine is pretended to be implied, is that in the tenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians: The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? The cup which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? In which it is said that the communion here spoken of, is a partaking of Christ's death, and of all the benefits included in it. But the words, in their natural construction, will bear no such meaning. Our Lord, in the institution of his sacrament, calls the bread which he broke, his body; and the cup which he blessed, his blood. And the apostle plainly alludes to these words of our Blessed Saviour, and uses them in the same sense. The bread which we break, says he, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? that is, the bread which we break in this communion, is it not what our Lord appointed to represent his own body broken, and which he called his body? And the cup which we bless, is it not in like manner set apart to represent the blood of Christ? Is not our joint partaking of these in common, in this solemnity, a declaration

tion that we are christians, united in the same religious society, and forming one body, as we are partakers of one and the same bread and cup? And shall we then partake of the heathen sacrifices, which would be professing ourselves to be heathens, and not christians? For this is the apostle's argument. He is here cautioning the Corinthians against the sin of idolatry; and particularly against their partaking of the gentile sacrifices, which were offered, as he says, not to God, but to devils. And the meaning of his argument is thus summed up at last: Ye cannot, saith he, be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils, that is, ye cannot, consistently, eat and drink as christians in the Lord's supper, and at the same time pay the same honours to the gods of the heathen, or to demons. I shall not, at present, take upon me to explain, at large, the whole meaning of this obscure passage of scripture; but shall venture to leave this plain and obvious interpretation of the words here cited with you, as a full answer to all the forced constructions which have been put upon them, in order to extract this doctrine out of them.

I shall conclude with recalling your attention to the real advantages and benefits of this sacrament; which are the strengthening and refreshing our souls; the giving life and spirit to our religious endeavours, by imprinting a sense of piety and virtue deeply on the mind, and awakening our attention to all the motives of religion. It will strengthen our faith and animate our hope in the promises of God, when we commemorate, in these lively memorials, his divine goodness and compassion to sinners. It will enlarge our charity to our christian brethren; as it is a declaration of our communion with each other, of our being united under one common head, as members of the same spiritual body. And it will, undoubtedly, procure for us the present blessings and assistances of his grace, as far as he hath promised them in general, to those who devoutly serve him. In proportion as we improve by these spiritual exercises in true piety and virtue, we shall rise in the esteem and favour of God. But to suppose any such improvement, a necessary consequence of this sacrament, or that without such improvement this action itself will make

us appear virtuous in his sight, is a gross and dangerous delusion. If we make the most of these helps and advantages which it was intended to afford us, we shall not need to look out for any farther grants or privileges annexed to it. It is a probable means of procuring for us the favour of God here, by leading us into all righteousness, and upon these terms, and no other will it secure to us remission of sins, and a state of happiness hereafter.

S E R M O N XIII.

LUKE xxii. 19.

This do in remembrance of me.

IN treating upon the holy communion, from these words, I thought it necessary first, to consider the matter of the institution, the outward action, or solemnity, enjoined, and the application of mind with which it is directed to be done, or what is meant by that remembrance of Christ, which is enjoined in the text; Do this in remembrance of me. After which I proposed to lay before you, the ends and uses for which it was ordained, the duty and obligation of performing it; and lastly, the qualifications required to perform it worthily. The first of these, the nature and meaning of the Lord's supper in general I have explained at large, and have, from thence, shewn the ends and uses which are answered by it, and the

S benefits

benefits arising to those who worthily partake of it; I proceed now to shew, in the last place, the obligation we are under to perform it, and the qualifications necessary to receive it worthily.

The great benefits which attend the receiving this sacrament, are of themselves sufficient to recommend it to the observance of every christian, as it is one of the best means for their growing in grace and in all the habits of virtue, of fixing the motives of religion deeply on their minds, and deriving the blessing of God upon their endeavours. But beside these reasons of expediency we have, as we have seen, the positive command of Christ for observing this duty, so that it is no longer a matter of pious choice and discretion, but of absolute and strict necessity. The words of the institution recorded in the three first of the evangelists, amount to a clear and plain precept, enjoining the practice of it. And they were so interpreted by the apostles, and first followers of our Lord: who, as we see in the Acts, immediately after his ascension began to celebrate this religious solemnity, and made it a part of their constant worship.

worship. St. Paul, who was yet a stranger to the gospel, and called to the ministry by immediate revelation after the ascension of Christ, was instructed likewise by immediate revelation in all the doctrines of christianity. This he is careful to tell us, in several parts of his epistles. Immediately I conferred not, saith he, with flesh and blood, neither went I up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me: neither received I it of man, nor was I taught it but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.* And this duty was thought of so much consequence that it was made a part, as he himself tells us, of this extraordinary commission, to teach and explain it. I received, saith he, of the Lord, that which I also delivered unto you; that the Lord Jesus, in the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and blessed and brake it. And after repeating the whole form of the institution, he adds, as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew forth the Lord's death till he come: that is, till his second coming, to judge the world. Which plainly implies that it is a duty not of temporary obligation only, but universally obliging

S 2

all

all christians, and to continue in force till the end of the world. This duty then appears in scripture, with all the marks of importance that can recommend it to our regard: and that not only from the natural solemnity and sacredness of it, but chiefly from the repeated authority of Christ enjoining it; and the extraordinary care with which it is inculcated.

It deserves, indeed, to be considered as a circumstance which adds weight to our obligations to this duty, that we can see ourselves the admirable tendency and usefulness of it; and the gracious designs of the institutor, to promote our benefit by it. But if it had pleased God to enjoin us a duty which we could not see the propriety or reasonableness of, or any natural connection it had with our spiritual interest, it is certain we should be nevertheless indispensably obliged to observe it. The Jews had a great number of observances enjoined them, many of which seem to have had no visible foundation in reason or the principles of morality: and yet how careful, how religiously scrupulous were they in keeping them, even to the minutest circumstance. Under the christian

tian dispensation these burthenfome services are happily removed, and the few religious ordinances which are appointed in their stead, are so easy in their practice, and so apparently calculated to promote the interests of morality, and to assist us in the discharge of our duty, that we are left for ever without excuse, if we neglect them.

Secondly, if the authority of Christ can receive any additional weight from outward circumstances, it may deserve to be mentioned, that the observance of this sacrament was the last command, the dying request of our Blessed Lord. It was instituted the same night in which he was betrayed : when he was now about to die for our sins, and giving the highest proof of his love to mankind, that could possibly be given. For greater love, saith the apostle, hath no man, than this ; that a man give his life for his friend. And indeed the institution itself seems designed, on his part, to shew still his gracious disposition toward returning sinners, and to serve as a pledge and memorial of his love to all generations ; which leads me to

A third consideration, which may serve to strengthen our obligations to this duty, and that is, the agreeable nature and character of it; as it is not only an instance of obedience to Christ, but peculiarly addressed to his honour, and appointed by himself, as the way in which he will accept our acknowledgments of that duty and gratitude we owe him. The first and immediate intention of it is to commemorate him as our Lord and Saviour. It is an expression of that reverence and regard which we ought to retain for his memory. It cannot, therefore, but be a pleasing and delightful exercise to every sincere christian, who is duly sensible of the great things which our Saviour Christ hath done and suffered for us. Gratitude is a principle which delights in exerting itself. Nature prompts us to all the offices of it: and the mind is always rewarded with a generous pleasure and satisfaction in the discharge of it. This consideration, therefore, ought not only to recommend this duty, but to endear it to our practice. If we can by this means pay any part of that debt of love and honour which we owe to our redeemer, surely we ought

ought joyfully and thankfully to embrace the opportunity of doing it : and our neglect of it must be attended with the reproach of the highest ingratitude, as well as disobedience.

Upon the whole then, this duty comes recommended to us by all the motives that can engage our obedience ; it hath the highest sanction that authority can give it : and is bound upon us by the ties of gratitude, as well as duty. It is not only easy in practice, but agreeable, and in the highest manner beneficial : as it is the best means of strengthening and improving our virtue and piety, and consequently of promoting our spiritual, which is our highest and only true interest.

But I am aware that the motives of duty and interest, which have been mentioned, as adding mutual strength and support, may be thought in the present case to clash and interfere, and to destroy the force of each other. The obligation of this duty is here ultimately resolved into the authority of God enjoining it. And we are, at the same time, taught that God did not enjoin this merely as a

test of our obedience, or in order to assert his right of sovereignty over us, but for wise ends and reasons respecting our own growth and improvement in virtue; that it is the chief intention of it to cultivate and strengthen good principles in us, and to assist us in the performance of other duties. If, therefore, men can, by keeping a strict eye over their conduct, secure their virtue as well without it; they may think themselves justified in neglecting the means, when they have already attained the end. It will be therefore necessary to observe in answer to this,

First, That it is a vain presumption in any man to think himself so perfect, as not to want the assistance of those means which God hath prescribed for his spiritual improvement.

And Secondly, supposing him as blameless in other instances of duty as he may think himself to be, yet no regard to other duties, how punctual soever it may be, will be allowed as a plea of exemption from this: his obedience to God can never be perfect, unless he complies in every instance with his commands.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, We must always distinguish betwixt the reasons which may be assigned for God's enjoining any duties, and the reasons for our performance of them. God hath been graciously pleased to submit, in some degree, the reasons of his government to the understanding and judgment of men: and we are allowed, with all humility, to enquire into and satisfy ourselves of the reasonableness of all his dispensations towards us. And in most cases the wisdom and justice of his laws readily discovers itself to every enquirer. But in these instances the ground of our obedience is not the perceived reasonableness and fitness of the thing to be done, but the authority of God enjoining it. And therefore, as I have observed before, though we could not in some instances discover the reason of God's commands, we should be still under the same indispensable obligation to perform them. In the case before us, the duty enjoined is so apparently subservient to the interests of morality, so visibly calculated to strengthen every religious principle in the heart of man, and to promote the practice of every christian virtue; and these are ends so worthy

worthy the authority that instituted it, that we may safely presume to assign them as the reasons of its appointment, and the principal ends intended to be served by it. But God has not left it to these reasons, to work on our prudence and discretion, and so to determine our judgment to the practice of this duty ; but has expressly commanded the performance of it. Here then is the ground of our obedience : a motive equally obliging in all the circumstances of life, and from which no reasons of our own can possibly absolve us. Though, therefore, this and the other ordinances of religion may be considered as auxiliary duties, as intended principally to promote the practice of righteousness and moral virtue ; yet let it always be remembered that they are from the time of their institution in the rank of moral duties themselves, and oblige in virtue of moral principles : being bound upon us by the most sacred tie of all morality, the authority of God.

As to the frequency of performing this duty, the scriptures have laid down no rules for our conduct in this particular. It must be left to our own reason and judgment

ment to determine from the nature of the institution itself, and the opportunities we have of communicating. But thus much is plainly implied in the words of the institution,—Do this as oft as ye shall drink it in remembrance of me; and again, As oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew forth the Lord's death till he come. This, I say, is plainly implied in these expressions, that we ought frequently to join in this duty. In the time of the apostles this sacrament seems to have been a part of their daily service. We are told in the Acts, they continued daily in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house; and for more than an age after, it was observed at least weekly in the church: and it seems plain from the history of those times, that the greater part of christians communicated as oft as they had this frequent opportunity of doing it. It is certain that we cannot too often commemorate our great lawgiver and mediator, or think on the obligations we are under to observe his laws. We cannot too frequently reflect on his sufferings and death, whether as a token of God's hatred and abhorrence of sin, or as a ground of our hope and assurance
in

in his mercy; we cannot too often pay this honorary regard to the memory of our redeemer, or express our thankfulness to God for his great mercy, shewn in the work of our redemption: all which, as I have observed to you, is implied in this solemnity. If we consider this ordinance first as an act of homage paid to the authority of God, we ought, in duty, so often at least to perform it, as to shew thereby a proper reverence for his laws, and to keep ourselves free from all appearance of contempt for his sacred ordinances. If we consider it again as designed by providence for our own benefit and religious improvement, we ought farther, in prudence, so far to comply with it, as to keep a sense of religion, and the motives of it, alive and quick upon our minds; and to derive upon ourselves all the benefits that are annexed to it.

I proceed now, in the last place, to enquire what qualifications are necessary to the worthy receiving this holy communion. The rules for the worthy receiving this sacrament, must be either drawn from the nature and design of this sacrament itself, or such as are expressly laid down

down in scripture, for our direction in this matter. Now in the words of the institution, we have not only the matter of this sacrament, or the thing which is to be done, but the manner how; the attention and application of mind with which it is to be done, distinctly prescribed. It is to be done in remembrance of Christ. What is meant by this remembrance of our Blessed Saviour, I have already explained to you at large. It certainly means more than a transient or general recollection of him: it must imply a distinct attention to the several characters and relations which he bears to us; a present sense of the honour and reverence due to him under these characters; and of the obligations which are brought upon us by the relations which we mutually bear to him. Whoever receives this sacrament with this attention of mind, seems, as far as we can judge from the words of the institution, to receive it worthily. He fulfills the precept of our Blessed Saviour in the manner which he prescribes; and doubtless such a performance of it will not fail to produce those good effects on the mind, which were intended as the principal end to be answered by it. The
two

two things then implied in the nature of this institution, as necessary to the performance of it, are, first, a competent knowledge of the nature of the duty itself: and secondly, a serious attention of the mind, in the performance of it, to the several particulars implied in it.

But how are we then to secure this attention of mind, or bring ourselves to that composure and recollection of thought which is required in the performance of this holy exercise? It is certain, for the most part, that we cannot so wholly govern our attention, as on a sudden, to abstract our thoughts from the things of the world, and direct them wholly to spiritual objects. Upon this principle, I suppose, is founded the duty of preparation, which is generally prescribed, in order to the worthy receiving this sacrament. It is plainly in the nature of the thing, not only a great indecency, but a very criminal presumption, to approach the table of the Lord with the same indifference that we sit down to a common table. Accordingly St. Paul tells the Corinthians, who were so careless in the celebration of this solemnity, as not to discern the Lord's body ;

body ; that is, as to make no difference betwixt this and a common feast ; that they eat and drank their own condemnation : or as he explains himself immediately after, instead of deriving to themselves any benefits or blessings from this holy sacrament, they provoked the justice of God, and drew down many temporal judgments upon their heads. For this cause, saith he, many are weak among you, and many sleep ;* that is, many are visited with sickness, and some with death. He then proceeds to lay down this general rule for our conduct in this point : Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.

The expediency, therefore, of some preparation for this holy sacrament, is well supported, both by reason and scripture. But this preparation is more or less necessary in degree, according to the different state and temper of men's minds. Those who are accustomed to religious exercises, and have, by a constant attendance on the duties of piety, kept a sense of religion alive and warm in their hearts, are very easily prepared, or may be said indeed, without any previous discipline,

to

* 1 Cor. xi. 30.

to be habitually prepared for this duty. On the other hand, those who are more engaged in the cares and pleasures of life, have need of more recollection ; and those who are engaged in any sinful courses, of still more application and pains to bring them to that religious frame and temper of mind, which is absolutely necessary to their receiving this sacrament in a worthy manner.

The general precept, therefore, of St. Paul, Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat ; applies itself with a very different force to particular persons, according as it finds them differently disposed to the services of religion. In general, the articles in which men are chiefly concerned, to satisfy themselves that they are rightly prepared, are well summed up by our church in those of repentance, faith, and charity. The connection, therefore, of which, with this duty, I shall just point out briefly before I conclude.

As to the first of these, it is at all times necessary, when we ask forgiveness of our sins, that we should express our sorrow for, and detestation of them ; but this
com-

commemoration of the great sacrifice which was made for sin, is so particularly fitted to work in us a sense of our guilt, and inspire us with a horror of it, that it is impossible to be rightly attentive to the design and meaning of it, without repenting at the same time of our former sins, and stedfastly resolving to lead a new life. Secondly, a lively faith in the mercies of God is likewise inseparable from a due performance of this ordinance; in which we commemorate the death of Christ; by which this mercy is assured and sealed for ever to us.

Lastly, as this sacrament is a profession of our communion, one with another, if we would be worthy or even consistent partakers of it, we must be in perfect charity with all men. We hereby testify, publicly, not only our union with Christ our head, but that we are likewise members one of another. And it seems more peculiarly implied in the nature of this duty, that when we are commemorating the meek and holy Jesus, and solemnly professing ourselves his disciples and followers, we should ourselves put on the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit;
T
and

and bring with us that peaceful and benevolent temper of mind, which is the great distinctive mark of christianity.

But it must be observed, that these duties are not only necessary to fit us for the worthy partaking of the holy communion, but are at all times required to recommend our services to God. They are, indeed, the constant, standing, the daily and habitual duties of all christians. Nor are there any obligations laid upon us after receiving this sacrament, but such as are at all times indispensably required of christians. Let no man, therefore, be frightened from this holy ordinance, by any imagined difficulties or dangers in his attendance upon it. Those who live soberly, righteously, and godly in this world, are at all times (as I said) and without any previous forms, prepared to receive it. Those who have been more wanting in their duty, may yet, if they repent them truly of their former sins, resolving to lead a new life of piety and charity, come boldly to the throne of mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

S E R M O N XIV.

JOHN xvi. 7.

It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you.

THE scriptures of the New Testament, which give us our Saviour's history a little before his passion and ascension, contain a great many remarkable passages, but such at the same time as require some degree of attention to understand and improve them.

They are taken up mostly in his private discourses to his disciples, in removing their prejudices against his person and doctrine, and opening their minds, by degrees, into a fuller understanding of the spiritual nature of that kingdom, which he was going to establish in the world.

T 2

Through

Through the whole, what is most remarkable and affecting is, the extreme tenderness and concern which our Saviour expressed for his disciples, just before his departure from them, and the manner in which he endeavoured to remove their apprehensions occasioned by it.

Though the little remainder of the time he had now left, was to be employed chiefly in speaking of the things pertaining to his kingdom, and the high concerns of man's redemption ; yet, observing that sorrow had overwhelmed their hearts upon the news of his departure, he immediately enters into their concern, and makes it not the least of his cares to satisfy their natural fears and apprehensions, that were raised upon this occasion. The severe trial that was now going to befall the disciples, was, with the loss of their master, every other prospect of happiness ; they having long forsaken all, and given up every worldly dependance to follow him. Our Blessed Saviour, who was himself an example of suffering, who knew our frame and whereof we were made, knew all the innocent affections and infirmities

firmities of human nature, was sensible too, that any afflictions, if extreme, were not to be reasoned down, and over-ruled by argument, but were to be treated in a more gentle manner; and partly by persuasion, and partly by indulgence, must be diverted rather for a while, till time and better thoughts should come in to correct them.

He therefore does not endeavour to remove their sorrow, by mere reasons only, but prepares them for it by several steps and degrees. — The first notice he gives them of his going away, was concealed in such doubtful terms, as might give them room rather to suspect, than fully to understand it. — A little while (says he) and ye shall not see me, and again a little while, and ye shall see me, and because I go to the father. His disciples said, therefore, among themselves; what is this that he saith? A little while? we cannot tell what he saith.

When afterwards he found it necessary to explain his meaning to them, he almost prevents their surprise, by suggesting to them many arguments of consolation.

Let not (says he) your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. — He tells them that his going away was for his own advancement, and for their benefit; that in his father's house were many mansions; that he would shortly come again, and take them to himself. — And in the mean time he would not leave them comfortless, but would send an Advocate or Comforter to them, who should abide with them, and more than supply the loss of his presence with them.

It is, therefore, for many reasons, expedient that I should go away; and particularly, if I go not away, the comforter will not come unto you. How this promise and prediction was fulfilled, and what was the import of it, we shall easily collect from the history of the Gospel and the Acts: after which it will not be improper to enquire what reflections the subject will afford for our own use and improvement.

The work of preaching the gospel to all nations, to which the apostles were now first commissioned by our Lord, was so far beyond their strength, the dangers to
which

which it exposed them, and the apparent impossibility of succeeding in it were such, that every motive was necessary to encourage and support them in it. Our Lord had, therefore, frequently, in his conversations with them, pointed out in more obscure and general terms, the trials in which they were to be engaged; and at the same time intimated the extraordinary support and assistance which they might expect, in order to animate their zeal and courage, and to prevent that despondency of mind which a nearer and fuller prospect of these difficulties would naturally create within them.

To repress the pleasing hopes with which they flattered themselves, of living in ease and pleasure, and sharing in the honours of that kingdom which they expected Christ to set up on earth, he early taught them that the portion of his servants here, would be poverty and reproach; that whosoever would be his disciple must take up his cross and follow him — that they should be persecuted from city to city — should be hated of all men for his name's sake — and that the time was

coming when men would think that they did God service by putting them to death.

But then to arm them with patience and resolution, he tells them that their sufferings and virtue should not be overlooked or forgotten; that blessed should be the persecuted for righteousness sake; and that when reviled and spoken evil of falsely, for his sake, they might count it matter of joy and gladness, for great was their reward in heaven; that in the meantime he would not leave them comfortless; that his peace should be ever with them; that if in the world they had tribulation, in him they should have peace. When you are called (says he) before kings and magistrates for my sake, think not what ye shall answer, neither be ye of doubtful mind: it shall be given you in that same hour, what ye shall answer and what ye shall speak; for it is not you that speak, but the spirit which speaketh in you.

If the work to which they were called was difficult beyond all human strength, or prospect of success, he tells them that they should be endued with power from on high, to accomplish it; that they should
be

be invested with the same miraculous powers that he himself was. The works which ye see me do, the same shall ye do also : and greater works than these shall ye do, because I go to the father. In which he intimates more obscurely, what he was now clearly unfolding to his disciples, that his presence must be withdrawn from them, but that it should be amply compensated, by the supplies of the spirit, which he would communicate to them ; that if he left them on earth, it was to be their friend in heaven, to be their advocate and mediator, and to make perpetual intercession for them with the Father. If they were ignorant, unlearned, and as yet uninstructed in the mysteries of the gospel, and the methods which providence had laid out for its propagation in the world, he promised to send them the spirit of truth, which should lead them into all truth, and bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever he had said unto them.

It appears from scripture, that the apostles did not comprehend the whole nature and design of their religion, when our Saviour left them. They knew not then
what

what person he was, or how he was to save them, or what that salvation itself implied. They knew little of the nature of his kingdom, or the manner in which it was to be set up and established. Instead of conceiving aright the nature of that redemption from the power of sin, which he came to purchase for them, they were still forming imaginary schemes of greatness to themselves, saying, a little before our Saviour left them, Lord wilt thou, at this time, restore again the kingdom to Israel?

From these, and other instances, it appears that the apostles were left in great ignorance of the christian religion, and that many points which had not been taught them in the history of the gospels, were to be revealed to them afterwards. It was not our Saviour's design to instruct them personally in every thing; he taught them only in part, and as they were able to bear it. I have many things, says he, to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now; howbeit when he the spirit of truth shall come, he shall guide you into all truth.

All

All these blessings then, supports and assistances were implied, and no doubt sufficiently understood by the apostles, in the promise of the Comforter, which our Saviour makes in the text. And how perfectly verified the promise was in these several particulars, very fully appears afterwards. They no sooner opened their mouths and taught, than the power of God was seen working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. As soon as they were assembled on the day of Pentecost, they were at once illuminated and filled with the other gifts of the spirit, the word of knowledge and wisdom, the gift of prophecy, the miraculous powers of healing diseases, and of speaking different languages, the better to propagate this religion in the world.

Whether these gifts were permanent and habitual, always attending the will, and exerting themselves at the pleasure of those to whom they were imparted, or whether temporaneous only, and granted but on special occasions of emergency and importance, it is not very material to inquire. It is certain that they taught the
word

word with all boldness, and with such force and effect, that none of their adversaries were able to gainsay, or resist it. If in every city bonds and imprisonment awaited them, they were yet filled with all joy and peace in believing; they gloried in the cross of Christ, and thought themselves happy in being counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

Thus was the promise of the Comforter verified and accomplished, in the persons of the apostles. What inferences we may draw from this argument, for our own use and improvement, I come next to enquire.

And first, we may, from the analogy of God's providence and his care for the support and comfort of his church, infer, that though, not only the presence of Christ, but those miraculous powers which succeeded it in the first age of the church, are now withdrawn; there is still abundant evidence left of the truth of his religion, to support the faith of his followers, and to convince unbelievers. If God has not given us the very strongest motives that could be offered to engage
our

our faith, or induce our obedience, it is expedient for us that he should not. If the rewards and punishments of another life were presented like other objects, and made visible and palpable to our senses, it would be impossible to resist their force; men would be necessarily obedient to their duty, and be forced, in spite of themselves, to eschew the evil and chuse the good. It has pleased God, therefore, to remove those incitements to our duty, to a convenient distance, and to shade the lustre of them so far that they may not so strongly impress our imaginations, or excite our passions, but that room may be still left for the trial and exercise of our virtue; that a discrimination may be made betwixt the good and the bad, and that the incorrigible and impenitent may not, as is implied in the idea of a state of probation, and as is indeed necessary in the nature of things, partake in common of the same happiness in another life, with the good and well deserving.

If we have not the same ocular conviction of the truth of religion, which the apostles and some of the first christians who were witnesses of the repeated
miracles

miracles of our Saviour had, we have not the same prejudices and prepossessions to overcome; we are not called, as they were, to give up their old opinions, customs, principles, for the sake of a religion which was yet new and strange, and had gained none of the authority of the world to its side. We have, however, sufficient evidence yet left of the truth of religion, to convince every fair and impartial enquirer; as much as is expedient for our present state; and perhaps only as little as is necessary to leave room for the exercise of our faith and obedience. We have the miracles of the apostles, as well as those of Christ, recorded and confirmed, not only by the evangelists and first disciples of our Lord, but by such facts as carry in them the attestation of multitudes; the conversion of thousands, who were under every prejudice that could be formed against it, the sudden establishment and prodigious progress of it in the world. We have the scrutiny of ages and of its ablest enemies, tried in vain against it. We have a witness unquestionable in the bible, against its pretended friends; whose corruptions and abuses have invalidated

lidated the evidence of it; and have many of the prophecies of Christ before our eyes accomplished.

To those, therefore, who are not satisfied with the common motives of belief, but desire some extraordinary method, some immediate miracle to convince them, the answer of scripture is, they have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them. Let them make an honest use of the information God hath allowed them, by these his servants; but if they wantonly reject this evidence, let them not expect that God should work a miracle to convince them. For the common evidence of the gospel is so strong, and the influence it would have on an uncorrupted mind, so considerable, that whoever has any how wrought himself to a hardness and insensibility so great, as that this would have no effect upon him; that man would not be persuaded, though Christ were still to preach his gospel upon earth. Even in this case, he would find some way or other to evade the conviction, and to withhold the obedience of faith.

Secondly,

Secondly, it may not be foreign if we draw some reflections from hence, in relation to Christ's spiritual presence; and observe that it is expedient in this sense too that he should sometimes go away.

The best of christians are sometimes liable to this infirmity; they do not always feel the same satisfaction in the discharge of their duty, but sometimes fall into dejection and weakness of spirit: and finding their faith weak in these dangerous moments, may be inclined to suspect the goodness of their state.

It is expedient, however, that they should, sometimes, be subject to such complaints, to put them in mind of their total dependance on God,—to correct some lesser failings that may have passed unobserved, or to prevent them from growing too secure in their spiritual state.

Those inward pleasures which flow from the discharge of our duty and a good conscience, are to be considered as the good gifts of heaven, to encourage us in our duty, and may be as useful in our spiritual

tual life, as prosperity in the natural. But then, like other outward blessings, they may have a very contrary effect, and serve to fill men with spiritual pride and conceit, and to imagine themselves in a higher state of perfection than others. Should the sincere christian, therefore, at any time (and the sincere christian often will) should he fall in an evil hour into any religious despondency, have his mind cast down, and his soul disquieted within him ; yet let him still put his trust in God, and be assured that if he can resign himself implicitly to the will of heaven under these trials, he may be in a state of favour with God, and shew as clear an instance of christian piety in that very instant when he is least aware of it, as they who are always happy in the peaceful and pleasant ways of religion, and do therefore, in this life, in a great measure, receive their reward. Blessed indeed, and happy are they who in this sense see and believe ; who feel a constant satisfaction in the course of their duty, and are from thence encouraged to persevere and practise it in a still better manner. But blessed also, and more happy are they, who though they do not see, do yet believe ;

U

lieve ; who under dejection, adversity, and distress, can hold fast their integrity and faith ; who against hope can believe in hope ; and even when appearances are strong against them, and heaven itself looks inauspicious, can maintain a generous submission and loyalty to the governor of the universe ; and acknowledge his administration of things in general to be perfect and for the best.

Lastly, a farther use for which we may all, sometimes, want to apply to the argument of the text, is to reconcile ourselves to the lot, and bear with patience the loss, when any of our friends or relatives are taken from us.

One of the greatest misfortunes that can befall us in this life, is the loss of those whom the ties of friendship or relation have justly endeared to us. Yet under these afflictions we may learn to moderate our concern, by reflecting that it was expedient, some way or other, that these blessings should be removed from us:

It is not easy to imagine any under deeper circumstances of distress, than the
disciples

disciples were now in, upon the loss of their master. They had from the first forsaken all, and given up every worldly alliance and relation to follow Christ. They had not only no friend left to rely on, but the whole world was engaged in opposition to them and their designs. All their expectations and dependance was fixed upon him; and in his departure they lost every thing. Nevertheless it was expedient we find, for the reasons above-mentioned, that he should go away; and we must think it necessary in the designs of providence, that those for whom we have entertained the highest regard, should depart and go away from us.

We, indeed, full of our own schemes and wisdom, may judge their continuance here to be necessary, for many reasons; and may think it a hard providence to be deprived, one after another, of the sweetest blessings that life afforded: but in all these cases our wisdom is foolishness with God, and his appointments are not only just in themselves, but expedient too for us.

It may sometimes be expedient, perhaps upon their own account, that they should

go away.—Had they survived longer, they might perhaps (in a course of human misfortunes) have fallen into some great infirmity of mind, some ill accident of health, or uneasy circumstance of fortune, as would render life of little value.—Their virtue above all, may, by some means, have been in danger, as it ever must in a state of trial, and it seemed best to divine wisdom to remove them into another state, when they were in the best degree of preparation for it.

It may be expedient too for us, that they should go away. Those very ties of affection which engaged and rendered them agreeable to us, might prove the means of our hurt. They may, sometime or other, become the innocent occasion of our falling into sin, by the too great indulgence we give to their actions or their judgments. A regard to them may insensibly lead us to be remiss in our religious concerns, and in that sovereign regard we owe to the first of Beings, and who bears the nearest of all relations to us: or they may withdraw us too much from our temporal concerns, and from those duties to which our station in society

ciety obliges us;—or they may engage us too strongly to the world, and make us believe that something like perfect happiness may be found in it. It is expedient, therefore, they should go away, for if they go not away, some worse misfortune (if worse can be) may befall us: or some greater blessing (if there be greater) may succeed in their room; or there may still be infinite reasons in the scheme of divine providence, which may make these severe dispensations necessary and expedient.

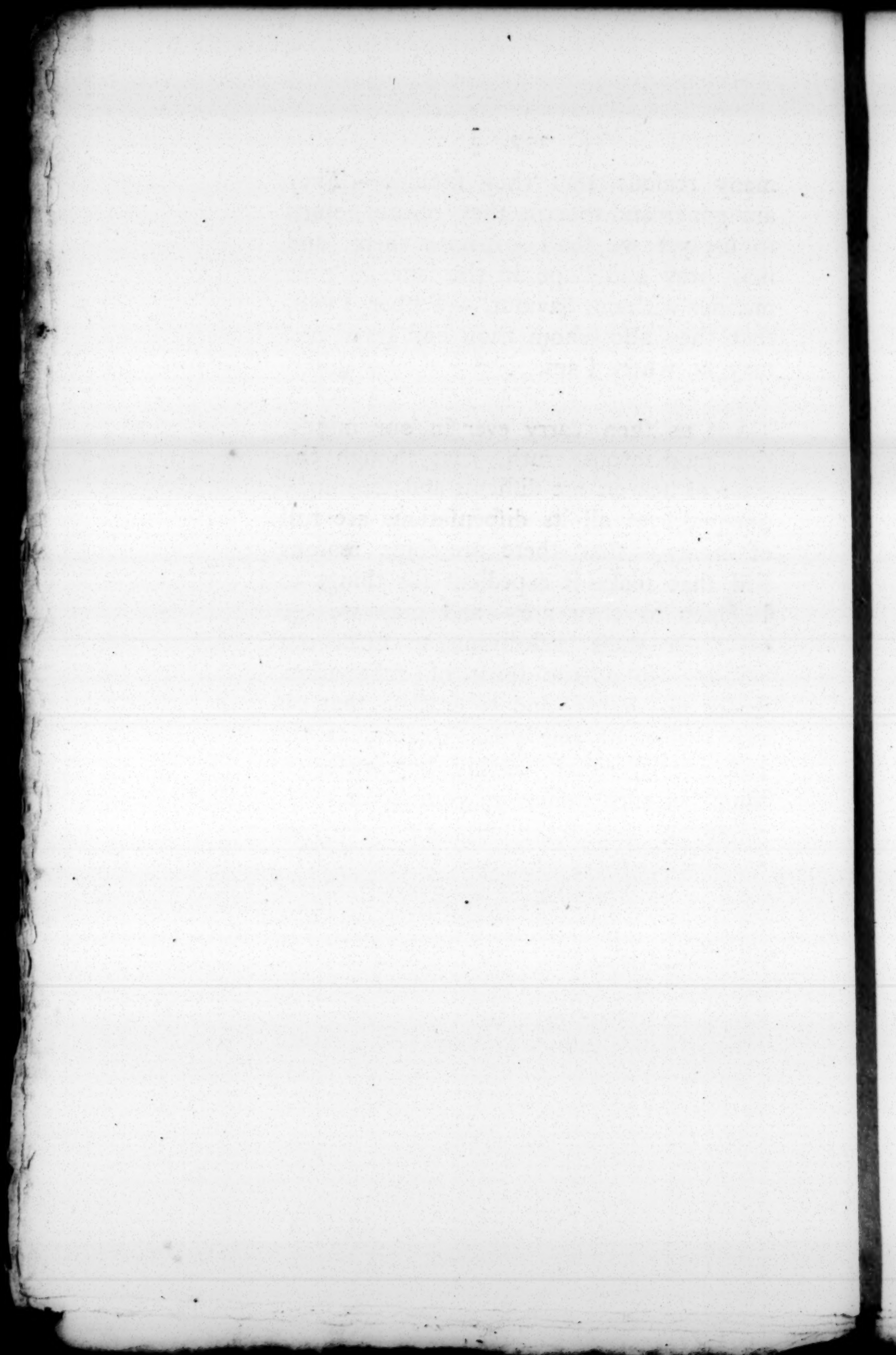
Together with which we may reflect farther, that their going from us is but for a time only, and in our Saviour's expression, Whither they go we cannot follow them now, but we shall follow them afterwards. If in the next life, all the connections of nature are supposed to be at an end, as there will be no more occasion for them, yet we may presume that alliances of virtue and friendship, which have their seat in the mind, shall survive and be as immortal as the mind itself. And though God himself is the supreme good and centre of all happiness, yet since we are taught to believe that

some part of the happiness of the next life will consist in the society of the place itself, it is natural to think that we shall have our lot assigned us in the society of those whose minds have been united before upon earth; whose dispositions have grown up in a mutual likeness; and to whom our natural hopes give us some reason to think we shall be united; that where they are, there we may be also.

After all that can be suggested, our natural passions must take their course, and it is very just they should do so, and when they move to the very farthest bounds of nature, and are kept at the same time under the strict restraints of religion, they shew one of the most beautiful parts of behaviour that can be expressed. Neither is it the design of religion to suppress our affections, but only to correct them in time, and to prevent our being overwhelmed with too much grief: putting us in mind that we must not sorrow as men without hope, upon the loss of our friends, since they are only gone before us to await our arrival in that place where are many mansions. They are gone, and it was expedient for
many

many reasons that they should. — They are gone, and though they cannot return to us, yet we shall go unto them, and may pray and hope in the same humble manner with our Saviour, — Father, I will, that they also whom thou hast given me, may be where I am.

Let us then carry ever in our minds, this momentous truth, that though the ways of heaven are difficult and seemingly unequal, yet all its dispensations are full of mercy — that there are some reasons still that make it expedient for things to be such as they are — and may we go on from these reflections to form our minds into a true spirit of resignation, under all events, and to practise that divine lesson of our great master, as the best ingredient of earthly happiness; in your patience possess ye your souls.



S E R M O N XV.

I PETER iii. 13, 14.

And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness sake, happy are ye.

HAPPINESS being the great end which every man must propose to himself, and religion the only sure method of arriving at it, it is therefore a very remarkable evidence of God's care and concern for us, that there is no motive or argument which he hath not employed to engage us in the love and practice of true religion, that so he might set us in the right road and gradually lead us on to the enjoyment of the most solid and durable happiness. To this end, there is scarce any faculty or affection of our nature to which he hath not suitably applied. Our understandings he hath tried to convince
by

by the reasonableness of the service he requires from us ; and our will he hath laboured to incline towards it by making its ways, ways of pleasantness ; to work upon our hopes he hath brought life and immortality to light, and fully disclosed to us an exceeding great and endless weight of glory ; to influence the opposite affection of fear, he hath set his terrors in array before us, and threatened disobedience with the worm that never dieth and the fire that is not quenched ; if love might prevail any thing with us, by this he hath eminently endeavoured to engage our service, having himself first loved us and manifested the high degree of his love towards us by sending his only begotten son into the world that we might live through him.

But besides these, which are the leading and primary inducements to the love and practice of true religion, the same gracious author of our Being hath not omitted to allure us to it by other inferior and secondary motives ; by motives of less value in their own nature, but yet more immediately adapted to us as sensible Beings, as creatures strongly intent upon
present

present happiness. To this purpose it is very observable, that he hath made our duty and interest, one and the same, and hath given us no commandments, but such only in keeping whereof there is great reward; that far from requiring any man to serve him for nought, he hath amply hired us to do his work, having made our labour in it profitable to all things, and given it the promise as well of this world, as of that which is to come.

The transcendent happiness of a future state is what few in their present condition can bring themselves to esteem as they ought, but worldly happiness and the several ingredients of it, pleasures, riches, honour, peace, or security, length of days or long life; of these we are all sufficiently sensible, and there is no man but what is forward enough to rate them at their full value. In this, therefore, the beneficent Creator, and Lord of all, appears to have very greatly consulted the frailty of man, that he hath so contrived and disposed the whole fabrick of the visible world, as to make all things work together for the good, even for the temporal as well as future good of those who love
and

and obey him. In consequence of this wise constitution of things, a man, who has but prudence enough to discern his interest, must needs be engaged to the practice and love of virtue, were it only with a view of promoting his present felicity; for though through the sinfulness and folly of man, this original order of nature hath been unhappily much perverted, it is yet undeniably true in the general that there is no surer method of acquiring happiness in the present life, of fitting ourselves for enjoying or securing ourselves in the possession of it, than a steady uniform practice of piety and virtue. He that would love life and see good days, saith the apostle, let him eschew evil and do good, that is, righteousness. Besides that it will certainly insure to us the inheritance of a blessing in the world to come, it is moreover the most effectual means of procuring us a long and easy continuance in the world that now is. This is the great principle here laid down and established on the joint authority of the psalmist and the apostle. And it is by a motive deduced from this general truth that the apostle here enforces on his christian converts the several duties

duties of a social life, assuring them that a regular conscientious discharge of such duties would prove the most likely and probable, or in the ordinary course of things the most effectual means of preventing any injurious treatment of their fellow creatures. For who, says the apostle, is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?

In discoursing on which passage I propose, First, to explain what course of life is here recommended or implicitly enjoined in these words—If ye be followers of that which is good.

Secondly, to make out the happy tendency of such a conduct, or to shew you that the following that which is good does really and according to the natural course of things greatly conduce to prevent our suffering any thing injurious from the rest of the world. For who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? And

Lastly, that whatever injuries we receive, whatever evils we suffer, there is still a happiness attending virtue, even in
this

this life, which nothing can wholly rob us of. But and if ye suffer for righteousness sake, happy are ye.

First I am to explain what course of life is here recommended or implicitly enjoined in these words, If ye be followers of that which is good. The difference between moral good and evil is fixed and invariable, deeply rooted in the nature of things, and easily discerned by every unprejudiced understanding. To perceive this difference is the first and greatest prerogative, to be bound by it is the natural law, and to comply with it in all cases without exception, is the highest perfection of a reasonable Being. To act in every instance as this difference requires we should, by choosing always the good and avoiding the evil, is one of the primary ends for which we were made, and to do it with a view to its being the known and declared will of God, declared as well by the original light of reason, as the additional light of the gospel, is the sum and substance of all religion. It comprises the whole of our duty whether it regards our Creator, our neighbour, or ourselves. And therefore as many as walk according to this rule
are

are in the fullest and most extensive sense of the apostle's expression, Followers of that which is good.

Whoever then would fully answer the description of the apostle, and be in the full latitude of the words, a follower of that which is good, must make universal righteousness the principal object of all his pursuits. To this he must habitually direct his views, and his actions, and make it his chief employment to arrive at it. In a word, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are lovely, pure, or of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, as many as would be eminently followers of that which is good, must meditate on, must delight in, and continually practise these things. These, I say, are the things which to love, choose, and prefer above every thing else, is what constitutes and compleats the character here mentioned. This is according to the utmost propriety of the words, to seek or follow that which is good; that which our own natural conscience declares to be good, and accordingly applauds us when we adhere to,

to, and condemns us whenever we deviate from it; that which God also hath shewn us to be good; for what doth the Lord our God require of us but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with him; and lastly, that which the gospel hath abundantly confirmed to be good, for wherefore did that grace of God appear unto men, but that it might teach them to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.

Piety and virtue make up our highest, and comparatively speaking, our only good. And therefore to be fruitful and abound in these; to be zealous in discharging the duties of an indigent, dependant creature, the duties of a social, and the duties of a reasonable Being, is the very thing to which we are here implicitly exhorted: tis pursuing that which is truly excellent, and truly good; which is absolutely so in its own nature; so with regard to the world in general; and so with respect to ourselves in particular. And of consequence whoever sincerely engages in the earnest pursuit of piety and virtue, may be very justly stiled in the
language

language of the apostle, a follower of that which is good.

But as the motive here employed by the apostle is not so much the general happiness that usually results from a virtuous conduct, as this particular consideration, that the following that which is good will naturally tend to secure us against injurious or ill treatment from our fellow creatures ; it is therefore very probable that this expression does here peculiarly refer to acts of kindness, beneficence, and good will, or the several duties of a social life. The discharge of these, is what we usually mean by doing good. A form of speaking proper and expressive, and of frequent use in the sacred writers. In this sense it is that St. Paul exhorts us, as we have opportunity, to do good unto all men : and again, that we ever follow that which is good, both among ourselves and towards all. In this sense we read of our Lord, that he went about doing good : and lastly, in this sense it is, that our Lord commands us to do good to them that hate us ; and his apostle, that to do good and to communicate we forget not. Taking the words

W

therefore

therefore in this sense — a follower of that which is good, is one who sincerely endeavours to procure and promote the comfort and real happiness of all mankind. He is one who studies not merely his own private interest or pleasure, but pays a due practical regard to the authority of the apostle, when he bids us seek not only our own, but every man another's welfare. His breast is warmed with a true principle of christian charity, a real unaffected benevolence to all the world; and this principle is not barren and inactive in him, but it worketh by love; it becomes fruitful and exerts its influence in acts of kindness, compassion, and mercy. To do good is to aim at the general happiness of our fellow creatures; to employ our talents and abilities, whatever they may be, in contributing to it; and to omit no reasonable occasion of so doing. A good man will not think it a trouble to lend his neighbour the assistance he wants, but will readily help him, though it be perhaps to his own hindrance. Out of the good things which providence hath freely bestowed on him, he will not think much to impart somewhat to the comfort, conveniency, or relief of others. He will
rather

rather delight in making his own abundance a supply for their wants; in giving them such things as he sees to be needful for the body as well as for the soul. A good man is never so entirely taken up with, or intent upon his own affairs, but he can find both leisure and inclination to be somewhat regardful of his neighbour's concerns, to bear a share in the prosperous or adverse state of his fellow creatures, and sincerely sympathize with them in every material alteration in it. A good man can derive a sensible pleasure from the happiness of others, and is touched with some feeling of their misfortunes or infirmities, as well as his own. Nor will he think it sufficient only to mourn with them, but will cheerfully deal out his bread to the hungry; his raiment to the naked; his comfort to the prisoners, the sick, and afflicted; his pardon to the penitent; his counsel to the weak, perplexed, or scrupulous; and his good will to all in general.

Many are the particulars of this character, and they are all fully and very expressively delivered in the precepts of the gospel. To instance in a few; we are

W 2

there

there commanded to be kindly affectioned and mutually subject one to another; to love as brethren, not in word or in tongue only, but in deed and in truth; and by love to serve one another. We are there also further commanded to bear one another's burthens; to assist our neighbour in whatsoever business he hath need of us; to give (within the bounds of reason and prudence) to him that asketh; and from him that would borrow of us, not to turn away. We are there taught that pure religion is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction; to comfort the feeble minded, support the weak, and be patient towards all. That we ought to remember them that are in bonds, as though we were bound with them, and them that suffer affliction, as being ourselves also in the body. And which comprises the whole of compassion in its fullest extent, we are there also exhorted to rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. These, together with some farther particulars of the same character, the apostle likewise hath here given us in the verses, at a small interval preceding the text; whence we may not improbably collect, what it was

was he chiefly intended, by a follower of that which is good. Finally, saith he, be all of one mind, having compassion one of another. Love as brethren; be pitiful, be courteous; not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing. On the whole then, to be a follower of that which is good, is either in the general sense of the words to be truly pious, upright, and temperate; or it is in the sense, which the apostle appears to have chiefly intended in this place, to abound in all the virtues that regard society; in the several good offices of a friend, a neighbour, and a brother to all mankind.

And how amiable does the man appear, whom this divine principle leads to consult the good of others in all his actions, who makes their joys and sufferings his own, and counts it his happiness to diffuse happiness around him! This is indeed to tread in the steps of our Lord and Master; to resemble even God himself in the brightest of all his perfections; and to serve our heavenly father in those works which are in themselves of the highest value, and in his sight of the high-

est price. But besides all this, to be thus followers of that which is good, is in truth the best way of consulting our present interest; the surest means of procuring us either a long and happy continuance in this, or at least a less tempestuous, a more comfortable and easy passage to a better life. And this brings me in the order I proposed, to consider,

Secondly, the happy tendency of such a conduct; or to shew you that the following that which is good, does really and according to the natural course of things greatly conduce to prevent our suffering any thing hurtful or injurious from the world. For who is he that will harm us if we be followers of that which is good?

The general happiness of a virtuous conduct, as depending on the care and interposition of a special providence, the apostle had before intimated in the verse immediately preceding the text; The eyes of the Lord, saith he, are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers. The particular advantages of a friendly, beneficent, and courteous behaviour, as
resulting

resulting from the ordinary providence of God, or, which is the same in effect, from the natural tendency and course of things, is what he here offers by way of motive and encouragement to such a behaviour, virtually assuring us in the words of the text, that to be thus followers of that which is good will prove a protection and security to us, will defend us from the passions of men, and from the hurtful and injurious effects of them. The apostle indeed does not here directly assert that an absolute security from all injuries is the certain, infallible consequence of following that which is good. This, no doubt, were apparently repugnant to the real state of things, to what the scripture hath in other places informed us of them, and moreover were what the experience of almost every one of us might readily confute; but that such a demeanour is the most probable or likely means, that it has a real, and no inconsiderable tendency to that end, this is evidently supposed and sufficiently asserted by him. And an assertion it is, so clearly founded in the reason of things, and for the most part so well justified by our own experience, that it needs not much authority nor many ar-

guments to make it good. There is no virtue commanded by God, or incumbent on man, which the infinitely wise ruler of all things hath not enforced in practice by natural as well as by positive sanctions. Hence there is no vice but what in the ordinary course of things is usually productive of confusion and misery; and no virtue but what as naturally tends to establish a proportional degree of order and happiness amongst men. In particular, love, piety, and a submission to God, are a law to us as intelligent Beings, and the natural sanction of these is inward tranquility and a peaceful confidence towards our maker. In like manner, sobriety, temperance, and decency, are a law to us as reasonable creatures, and the natural sanction of these is health and vigour, or the free use of all our faculties. And thus in the case before us, the several virtues that regard society are a law to us as sociable Beings, and the natural sanction of these is a quiet enjoyment of the comforts and advantages derived to us from a social life. There is in the human mind a secret veneration or inward reverence for that which is good; even the most profligate and vicious are forced to give the

the preference of esteem to virtue, though their passions and prejudices determine them to the choice of vice. Virtue will always have the publick voice, whatever countenance may be given to vice by the practice of men. Hence the protection of this character may be farther considered as not only procuring us friends and assistants, but likewise the favour of the civil power; which, as it is a terror to evil doers, is also for the praise and security of them that do well. In a word, it must, as far as is possible, cut off all occasion of hurting us, even from them that seek occasion, and on all these accounts greatly conduce to defend us from injury or harm. But

Thirdly and Lastly, if our virtue should, perhaps, expose us to the envy and malice of others, if our patience and meekness should provoke the ill-treatment of base, unworthy minds, who are sometimes encouraged in mischief by the hopes of impunity, yet still there is a happiness attending virtue even in this life.

The pleasure and satisfaction of doing our duty will, in great measure, compensate

fate for the sharpest sufferings and persecutions which can befall us. Virtue in every state of life enables us to taste the pleasures that belong to it in their full perfection, and if it does not secure us against the calamities of life, administers the highest comfort under them that we are capable of receiving. In every condition it makes us as happy as we are capable of being. While vice embitters our highest enjoyments with remorse and fear, and adds double terror and distress to our sufferings.

But if the evils of life are brought upon us by our adherence to virtue, our sufferings themselves will become a source of consolation. The conscious sense that our own worth and excellence is increased, that our moral character is raised and ennobled by them, will give new fortitude to the mind, and more real pleasure and enjoyment, than the highest elevation of sin and guilt can pretend to.

And this spring of comfort, instead of being exhausted by affliction, will always increase in proportion to it—in proportion as by our patience and fortitude we
give

give more glory to God, and more proof of our virtue and obedience. Virtue is tried only by labour and pains, by resisting temptations, conquering our passions, and surmounting difficulties. And in all these it is the same principle: self command, self denial, resignation and devotement of ourselves, of our will and affections to the law of right, to the law and will of God. If affliction then, and persecution, be the severest trials of virtue, they are the highest evidences of it: and the exalted pleasures that belong to it will be more exalted by them. But these are pleasures out of the reach of malice or fortune; they are a treasure in the possession of which no one can harm us; they are the only property which we can securely call our own; which we can defend against every invader, against the hand of rapine and the injuries of time, which is our own not for a moment only but for ever.

And this leads me in the last place to observe the absolute certainty of happiness in the end to all that are followers of good. Blessed, says our Lord himself, are ye when men revile you and persecute you,

you, and speak evil of you falsely for my sake: rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven. If virtue does not procure happiness for us in this life, it is however here accompanied with a consciousness of deserving it: and the greater our sufferings are in the cause of virtue, the greater will be our merit. And sure as the world is under a righteous administration, merit and happiness must coincide at last. There is a reward for the righteous, as sure as there is a God that judgeth in the earth.

Under a sense of this great truth, let us shew a becoming fortitude and equanimity, not only in wanting the envied pleasures and advantages of life, but in suffering any of the evils and disasters that are incident to virtue: rejoicing in the testimony of a good conscience, and knowing that we have in heaven a better and a far more enduring substance: and that if our virtue is proved by a light and momentary affliction here, it will work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory hereafter.

S E R M O N XVI.

HAGGAI i. 5.

*Now therefore thus saith the Lord of Hosts,
Consider your ways.*

TH E S E words are a call to the people of the Jews, to repent and amend; to think of their present state, with respect to God and religion; and to pursue these thoughts into their proper consequences upon their lives and actions. It appears from many parts of this chapter, that the hand of God had for some time been upon this people, but they continued insensible, and regarded it not. The prophet, therefore, here explains the meaning and intent of these judgments to them; that they were sent in punishment for their sins; to awaken them to a sense of their duty; and to reclaim them from their guilt. It is supposed, as a principle in this, and many the like exhortations

tations in scripture, that consideration will always make men religious, and bring the sinner back to his duty. There is, indeed, an inseparable connection betwixt reason and religion: we cannot think with any attention of God or ourselves, of our duty or interest, without awakening the sentiments of religion in the mind, and confirming ourselves in all the habits of piety and godliness.

I shall endeavour to recommend this duty in general, by shewing,

First, what is meant in the text, by considering our ways.

Secondly, by representing to you the benefits and advantages attending it; which may be looked upon as so many general calls of providence to the performance of this duty.

And shall, Lastly, specify some particular occasions which may render it more especially necessary, and incumbent upon us.

First, to consider our ways, is to consider what belongs to us as men and as christians;

christians ; to consider what we are ; in what our happiness consists, and how to secure it to ourselves. It is to compare our actions with their proper rule ; to attend to the principles and consequences of them ; in all conditions of life to carry reason and reflection along with us. It is to observe some œconomy in the government of our lives ; to call ourselves frequently to account for the use of our time, and the other talents which God has entrusted us with : or, to keep to the metaphor in the text, it is to consider whether we are in the way wherein we should go ; to be careful to make the best advances we can in it ; and to lay aside every weight that may hinder us in the race that is set before us.

In the due performance of this duty is implied, First, that we form to ourselves right principles of action, or a proper rule to walk by ; Secondly, that we compare and adjust our actions by them.

Before we can judge of our actions we must have some rule to compare them with. It is therefore the first step towards a rational life, or the first duty of consideration,

sideration, to lay out some plan or course of action, to have some fixed principles to form our conduct by. The ways through life are so many and various, and point so contrary some of them to other, that if any of them lead to happiness, there is great reason to fear that others must end in ruin and misery. Before, therefore, we make our choice, we must enquire which way our happiness, and on what side our danger lies. To enter upon life without this enquiry, is, like a mad adventurer, to embark all our hopes, and commit our fortunes to the wind, without either rudder to direct, or compass to steer our course.

There are certain questions of such universal influence and concern, that from the different resolution of them, all our actions and designs will take a different turn: for instance, What is the true end and happiness of man? Whether it be bounded within the limits of this narrow life, or whether we are to look for it in another life after this? Whether we are accountable to God for all our actions, or are at liberty to follow our own imaginations? Till these and some like ques-
tions

tions are resolved, we cannot take the least step in life without forfeiting all title to reason and consideration. And, these once determined, the course we are to take and the general principles upon which we are to act will appear plain before us. If for instance we are convinced that our interests and enjoyments terminate here, and that we have nothing to look for in another life; we may be then justified in making the most of this. We may take up the song of the Epicure, Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die. We shall, indeed, upon this supposition, have little further occasion for thought and reflection, nothing in this life alone will be worth much of our consideration. It is thus the ungodly are represented in the book of Wisdom, as reasoning with themselves, but not aright. Our life is short and tedious, and in the death of a man there is no remedy. We are born at all adventure, and we shall be hereafter as though we had never been, for the breath of our nostrils is as smoke, and a little spark in the moving of the heart: which being extinguished, our body shall be turned into ashes, and our spirit shall vanish as the soft air. Come

X

on,

on, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that are present, and let us speedily use the creatures like as in youth. Let us fill ourselves with costly wine and ointment, and let no flower of the spring pass by us. Let us crown ourselves with rose buds before they be withered. Let none of us go without his part of voluptuousness, for this is our portion and our lot is this*.

But on the other hand, if we find reason to believe that the scene of human life and action does not end here; if we judge with Solomon that God hath created man immortal, and made him an image of his own eternity; if we are brought into this world only to prepare us for a better; if we are under the inspection of an infinite Being, who will hereafter judge us according to our works; if after this life we shall be consigned to another, in which we shall be for ever happy or miserable, according as we have merited by our conduct here; very different conclusions will arise in our minds: such as will deserve our best attention, and ought to influence all our thoughts.

The

* Wisdom ii. 1.

The pleasures and enjoyments of this life will appear no longer of any value or account. Our first duty will be to enquire what the will of God concerning us is; our highest wisdom to sacrifice every thing to it; to resign every gratification, every pleasure that stands in competition with our duty. The pursuits of avarice and ambition will appear no longer rational or excusable. The libertine and voluptuary must lie open to the bitter sarcasm of Solomon, Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment*.

It cannot, therefore, be indifferent to us, on which side the truth in this question lies. The interest we have in determining it aright is infinite. An immense prospect, an eternity perhaps of happiness or misery lies before us; we stand upon the brink and may, for ought we know, be carried by the next gust of wind into this boundless ocean; and shall we loiter

X 2

idly

* Eccles. xi. 9.

idly on the shore; shall we amuse ourselves with painted shells and toys, while we are invited on the one hand to a country of real and immortal happiness, and threatened on the other to be carried into endless slavery and misery? In such a situation certainly we cannot, we ought not to rest, till we have satisfied ourselves whether what appears before us be a dream or reality, and if it appears a real and true prospect, without preparing by every art we can, and providing for our safety and happiness.

It is our felicity, who have been taught the christian religion, to have this and all other questions relating to our duty and happiness clearly decided. We have in the gospel a rule of life offered to us with such credentials as are in the best manner fitted to engage our attention and to convince the understanding. We have only to open our eyes and convince ourselves of the truth of this doctrine, and then to apply it in the conduct of our lives. Which leads me to the second thing I mentioned, as implied in considering our ways, which is, acting up to our principles, and conforming our actions to them.

The

The only end and use of consideration is action. I have thought on my ways, says holy David, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. If we do not carry our designs into execution, all our former pains will be lost. In vain we contemplate truth, and lay it up in our minds, if we do not call it out into action, and give it its due influence on our lives. We are not the better christians for understanding the christian religion, or for adopting all its articles into our faith. If we would know what our true character, what our rank and proficiency in virtue is, we must enquire of our actions, not of our principles and opinions.

Here then it is that men are most apt to deceive themselves. There are few who are wicked upon principle, and who deliberately abandon themselves to a life of vice. There are few who have not some principles of religion, and even a real design of living up to the conditions of it. But they are apt to rest there, and to mistake this design for the thing itself. They find in their serious intervals, some religious and devout sentiments in their

minds, and thence form a judgment of their religion and piety, without enquiring what evidences appear of either, in their morals and conversation. Yet nothing is more certain than that men who fully assent to all the doctrines and duties of christianity, and who at times feel the force and conviction of its truths very strongly on the mind, yet through indolence and inattention, act almost constantly contrary to these principles, and lead upon the whole very unchristian lives. The principles they profess lie neglected and dormant in the mind, and are like the hoarded treasure of the miser, of which there is no profit to the owner, save the beholding of it with his eyes. It is therefore a principal part of the duty we are recommending to compare our actions with their proper rule, and to adjust our practice by our principles; in other words, to see that we live as our own reason and judgment teach us that we ought. To this end we should reflect seriously on the great interest we have at stake; we should turn our attention to the motives of religion, and root the impression of them deep on the mind; and this will reciprocally quicken our attention, awaken all the

the springs of action in us, and give strength and success to our religious endeavours.

We have already seen, in treating upon these words, what is meant and implied in the duty of considering our ways: which I was, in the second place, to recommend to you, by shewing the obligations we are under to it, and the benefits that may be expected from it.

Among the motives which induce to this duty, the first mentioned, was the call of reason and conscience to it, and the satisfaction of mind derived from it. But I proceed to specify some particular occasions which may make the duty of consideration more particularly reasonable and necessary. Such are the stated times which God has appropriated for his more immediate service, or when, at any time, we prepare to join in the more solemn duties of religion.

That there is a better and worse in human actions, independent of our will and pleasure, is a truth so evident that it makes its way into the mind, almost without our attention. This then is an

admonition to us to consider that we are not blindly to follow our own will and inclination, but to look up for some higher rule of action; and at the peril of our happiness to conform to it. Again, if there be any such thing as duty or obligation upon man, it must be his duty to follow reason, which was designed as the guide to conduct him through life, and to lead him to the true end of his creation. This must be the fundamental duty which comprises every other. It must be the first law of all rational Beings to conduct themselves by that light of reason which God has given them to walk by, and to employ it to the uses for which it was given them.

We are indeed so made that we cannot act contrary to this principle without feeling the reproach of our own hearts, without a sense of guilt arising within us, and a dread of that punishment which may justly overtake it. We may, perhaps, for a time, by mixing in the business and pleasures of the world, and by endeavouring to forget ourselves, suppress these uneasy reflections, but they will still often find their way into the mind, bring shame
and

and terror along with them, and embitter all our enjoyments.

On the other hand, the man of reason and reflection, whose life is planned out and considered beforehand, goes on securely in a plain and sure way to happiness. By the duties of every day he gains something in his progress towards it. He is at peace in his own mind; his thoughts are at ease, free from anxiety and fear, because his interests are already considered and taken care of; his designs are formed and his measures taken. He can look back upon his past life with pleasure, for those actions will bear to be reviewed, which were before weighed and considered. He can enjoy the pleasures of this life, because he has laid up a good hope in the next. The consciousness of acting up to his character, of having acted a rational and becoming part, fills his mind with a generous pleasure, and he finds in the applause of his own breast a perpetual spring of joy and satisfaction.

I might, under this head, mention the pleasures of consideration itself. There cannot be a nobler entertainment to the mind of man, than to consider what belongs

longs to us as a species; what is man, and whereto serveth he; what is his good, and what is his evil; whether we are born for a day, or for eternity; in what manner God hath communicated his will to mankind; how he is to be worshipped and obeyed; the perfections of that infinite Being whom we are taught to adore and imitate; the wonders of his wisdom and goodness which shine so strongly through all his works; the beauty and excellence of virtue, as well as the duty and obligation of it; all of which are the proper subjects of religious consideration. And if we have not strength of mind to carry us through these enquiries, we have the best helps at hand to assist us in these exercises: we have numberless discourses on all the heads of piety and religion, written with so much force of reason, beauty, and eloquence, as adds new pleasure to the subjects themselves.

And now what are the pleasures for which we give up these, and for which we desert a duty so delightful as well as important? Is it merely for the sake of indolence and ease? Is it too much trouble to look into ourselves, and to converse with our own thoughts? But it costs

costs us more pains to fly from ourselves : and how often are we forced to take up with very bad company, merely to avoid our own? Is it painful to us to look into minds, so unfurnished with every thing that is useful and good, and to look back upon a life spent without thought and consideration? But it is high time then to consider. This evil if neglected will grow worse. It may, by care and diligence, be removed, and our minds be yet so far improved as to afford an agreeable and pleasing prospect to us. Is it for the sake of any real and more substantial pleasures? But what one pleasure of life is inconsistent with these duties? Pleasure, like other things, if we are continually feasted with it, cloyes and dulls the appetite. The way to enjoy pleasure is sometimes to retire from it. If we found no pleasure in these spiritual exercises, yet we should lose none : they would improve our other pleasures, by keeping up a relish for them. They shut us out from none of the natural enjoyments of life : you will always find these more enjoyed, you will always find more true cheerfulness, serenity of mind, and gayety of temper in the sober minded and innocent, than among those whose
business

business is pleasure, and their study luxury. They forbid us not to eat our meat with joy, and to drink our wine with a merry heart: but they prevent both our shame and misery, by forbidding the irrational and senseless pleasures of intemperance and impurity, which bring pollution, pain, and disease along with them; which shorten our days, or bring on a sudden, miserable, and contemptible old age. Men of the highest virtue, and of the greatest minds, can descend with wisdom to the most perfect trifles, and extract more pleasure than the most perfect triflers from them. But how dull and despicable does human life appear, when it is made up of trifles, without any improvement in knowledge and virtue, the proper improvements of man; when drove round in a perpetual circle of impertinence and folly — a youth of frolicks, an old age of cards?

But I proceed to mention another call to this duty, which is that of interest, implied in the success which we may promise ourselves from it. The importance of this duty, as to the end and object of it, has been already considered. All our interests, present and eternal are,
we

we have seen, involved in it. I shall, therefore, confine myself to the usefulness and expediency of it, as a means to this end.

When we have with our best care and circumspection, learnt where our true interest lies, and laid up in our minds the maxims and rules of life; vigilance and attention will still be necessary to give success to our endeavours. It will require great application of mind to keep the rule of our duty always in our eye, to compare our conduct by it, to bring up our actions to this standard, and to submit all our inclinations and affections to it. As in our temporal affairs the man of œconomy frequently looks into his accounts, and examines what his profits and losses are, that he may the better increase the one and guard against the other; so in our spiritual concerns, if we would go on successfully, we must learn where our strength and weakness lies; we must bring ourselves often to account; we must enquire what progress we have made in the ways of virtue; what good dispositions we have formed, what bad habits we have reduced; we must attend diligently to all the means and opportunities

nities of improving in virtue, and carefully avoid the snares and temptations to evil. The necessity of this discipline and œconomy in the government of the mind, is set forth in many of their writings by the philosophers of old. If you would have your son, says Socrates, taught the meanest mechanick art, you enquire for a master to instruct him ; you recommend patience and diligence to him ; you allow him a great deal of time to perfect himself in it. And is there no care, no pains to be taken in forming the mind ? Is there no art or industry required in the government of ourselves ; or is the science of life to be learnt with more ease, and practised with less diligence than any manual art ?

In our temporal affairs we cannot always guard against the strokes of fortune ; the best wisdom and caution cannot always secure us success : but in our spiritual endeavours, if we take the best care we can to inform ourselves in our duty, and faithfully practise it, we cannot finally miscarry. If through infirmity we err, our sincerity will be accepted, and our imperfections overlooked. The duty of a
christian

christian is generally summed up in faith and good works. The man who considers his ways, who considers the grounds of his belief, if through weakness of judgment or want of more light or learning he should fall into error, his faith would yet doubtless be accepted and held blameless before God, for the sake of his good intention, and his sincere endeavours after truth. While on the other hand the profession of the purest faith taken up without enquiry or consideration, can never recommend us to God. If we are in the right, it is owing to chance, and has nothing of the character of virtue in it. In like manner, the man who governs himself by reason is sure to recommend all his actions to God; none of his good works can be lost; because they are built upon true religious motives, and a sense of his duty to God. This right intention will even sanctify our most indifferent actions, and give them the stamp and character of virtue. So St. Paul seems to intimate, and to recommend it as an important part of œconomy in spirituals: whatsoever ye do, whether ye eat or drink, do all to the glory of God. That is, where men are well principled in religion,

ligion, and have a sense of their duty to God habitually in the mind, this will give a value to all their actions, and make them acceptable in the sight of God. On the contrary, without this principle, our best actions will be nothing worth: our good works, however fair they may appear in the sight of men, yet arising only from natural temper, a desire of esteem, or some other temporal consideration, and not from any religious motives, will be of no account before God.

Thus does this duty recommend itself to us as necessary to make a virtue of faith, to make our best actions good, and as of efficacy enough to atone for our errors and weakness.

I should now proceed to specify some particular occasions which seem to make the duty of consideration more particularly seasonable and necessary; but as this would take up too much of your time at present, I shall reserve it for some other opportunity.

S E R M O N XVII.

HAGGAI i. 5.

*Now therefore thus saith the Lord of Hosts,
Consider your ways.*

IN treating lately upon these words I
endeavoured,

First, to explain to you the duty recommended in them of considering our ways :

Secondly, to represent the benefits and advantages attending it ; which may be looked upon as so many general calls of providence to the performance of this duty.

I shall now proceed, as I proposed in the third place,

To specify some particular occasions which may render it more especially necessary and incumbent upon us.

Y

And

And First, afflictions and calamities may be looked upon as a special call of providence to this duty. We are not indeed to suppose that the hand of God does immediately interpose in all the events of life: many of the evils that befall us, are the effects of natural causes, as they are called. But as these arise from those general laws which God has ordained for the government of the world, they are as much to be ascribed to him as if immediately effected by him. They are a part of that system or constitution of things which he has appointed, and have their uses and ends, in the intention of providence, to serve. Now the natural effect of afflictions, and therefore doubtless the end intended by them, is to humble the mind of man, to bring him to a sense of his weakness and dependance, and to call home his thoughts and cares to himself. In the days of health and prosperity, the mind is perpetually filled from without; our attention is caught, and our thoughts called abroad by every object that presents itself to us: and when our appetites are gratified with present pleasure, the mind seldom looks forward, or
reflects

reflects on what is past. This careless, unconcerned state of mind, and the proper cure of it, adversity, holy David describes in himself; In my prosperity, I said, I shall never be moved, thou, Lord, of thy goodness hadst made my hill so strong. Thou didst hide thy face from me, and I was troubled. Then cried I unto the Lord, and gat me to my Lord right humbly. Affliction recalls our attention, silences the noise and tumult of the passions, and gives reason and conscience room to be heard. The pleasures which before deluded our senses, lose all their charms, and vanish into nothing. Things appear in their true light, divested of the false colours which dazzled our sight in the sunshine of prosperity. Our past actions will rise up in review, naked, and exposed in all their folly before us: and the mind, under a sense of its guilt, will look forward with anxiety and dread to the future. Afflictions, therefore, are to be considered as a natural, that is, a providential call to the duty of consideration; even though we should not suppose them sent immediately for that purpose.

But there is reason to believe that the providence of God does often interpose, as in favouring virtue, so in visiting sin and iniquity. The scriptures assure us that God afflicts, at times, the best and most favoured of his servants, in order to reclaim them from their offences, and for the exercise and improvement of their virtue. The Lord chasteneth those whom he loveth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth: and perhaps a part of the grace of God which we are taught to implore, may consist in so ordering the course of things, as to admonish us, by our own feeling and the example of others, of the danger of sin, and the necessity of obedience. It is certain that if we make the best use of the afflictions which befall us; if they reclaim us from our past offences, or awaken us to a better sense of our duty; if they may serve in the just judgment of God to expiate for our past guilt, or enhance our reward hereafter; they will prove a blessing to us, and encrease our debt of thankfulness to God. And on the other hand if we do not make these improvements from them, it will greatly aggravate our
guilt

guilt and condemnation. It is the proof of an abandoned and incorrigible spirit, when men refuse to learn obedience by the things which they suffer. This hardness and impenitent heart, the prophet here reproaches the Jews with; I smote you with blasting and mildew, and with hail, in all the labours of your hands, yet ye turned not unto me, saith the Lord*: intimating that this was the last warning which God would allow them to repentance. Whatever afflictions therefore befall us, from whatever causes they are supposed to spring, whether the general course of God's providence, or by his more immediate appointment; whether sent for correction or for mercy; the proper use, the principal end and intention of them is the same, namely, to call us to repentance, and to remind us of our duty.

But if this religious application be expected from us in every particular affliction, it seems much more a duty in us when any publick or general calamity comes upon us. If God sometimes interposes by a special providence, in visiting

Y 3

the

• Haggai ii. 17.

the sins of particular persons, we may with more assurance pronounce of publick and national evils, that they are the judgments of God, sent as actual punishments for the sins of a people, and are therefore to be considered as the most powerful warnings, as the loudest call of providence to repentance. In the case of particular offenders, it is not necessary that the justice of God should overtake them here, because this is not the time of final retribution; and whatsoever inequalities are permitted here, may be adjusted in another life. 'But societies and nations of men must, as far as they are the proper subjects of rewards and punishments, be punished and rewarded here'. So the prophet in the text, after enumerating the many evils that had been sent upon the Jews, explains the sense and meaning of them all. This, saith he, is the language they speak; Consider your ways. The circumstances of that people were indeed peculiar. Temporal good and evil were the only sanctions of their law; and national prosperity was expressly promised to national obedience: but that this is a general rule by which
 God

God deals with other nations, is very clearly taught us in many places of scripture.

But I proceed to observe, Secondly, that besides these accidental occasions of considering our ways, all such stated times as are dedicated to religious exercises, do in an especial manner oblige to this duty. God, who has a just right to all our time and service, has by an express command reserved one day in seven to himself, not for any accession of honour or happiness that can accrue to him from any homage we can pay him, but for our improvement in piety and virtue; and because a cessation from the cares and pleasures of life is necessary to our spiritual interests, to give us time to reflect, to inspect, adjust, and regulate our spiritual conduct. It is therefore our duty on this day, not only to attend the publick worship of God, to offer him up our morning and evening sacrifice of prayer and praise, which is itself an excellent means to promote the growth of every virtue in us; but likewise so to employ the remaining hours as may best conduce to this end. We are enjoined on this day to rest from all our

the sins of particular persons, we may with more assurance pronounce of public and national evils, that they are the judgments of God, sent as actual punishments for the sins of a people, and are therefore to be considered as the most powerful warnings, as the loudest call of providence to repentance. In the case of particular offenders, it is not necessary that the justice of God should overtake them here, because this is not the time of final retribution; and whatsoever inequalities are permitted here, may be adjusted in another life. 'But societies and nations of men must, as far as they are the proper subjects of rewards and punishments, be punished and rewarded here'. So the prophet in the text, after enumerating the many evils that had been sent upon the Jews, explains the sense and meaning of them all. This, saith he, is the language they speak; Consider your ways. The circumstances of that people were indeed peculiar. Temporal good and evil were the only sanctions of their law; and national prosperity was expressly promised to national obedience: but that this is a general rule by which
 God

God deals with other nations, is very clearly taught us in many places of scripture.

But I proceed to observe, Secondly, that besides these accidental occasions of considering our ways, all such stated times as are dedicated to religious exercises, do in an especial manner oblige to this duty. God, who has a just right to all our time and service, has by an express command reserved one day in seven to himself, not for any accession of honour or happiness that can accrue to him from any homage we can pay him, but for our improvement in piety and virtue ; and because a cessation from the cares and pleasures of life is necessary to our spiritual interests, to give us time to reflect, to inspect, adjust, and regulate our spiritual conduct. It is therefore our duty on this day, not only to attend the publick worship of God, to offer him up our morning and evening sacrifice of prayer and praise, which is itself an excellent means to promote the growth of every virtue in us ; but likewise so to employ the remaining hours as may best conduce to this end. We are enjoined on this day to rest from all our

Y 4 labours,

labours, not surely that we may be idle, and spend it in fruitless, unprofitable amusements; but that we may attend upon the Lord without distraction; that we may have leisure for retirement; and room to abstract ourselves from the cares and thoughts of this life, to attend our interests in a better. It is therefore plainly implied in the intention and meaning of this institution, that this day be kept separate, as much from worldly pleasures, indolence, and sloth, as from worldly labour and care. And though with this may be admitted proper intervals of relaxation, in which we may innocently mix with company, and share in the pleasures of conversation; yet it is certain, that to spend the whole or the greater part of it in idleness and vanity, is a very criminal waste of our time, and a direct breach of God's commandment. If this, which seems a very plain and certain truth, were enough considered, we might hope to see a much greater regard paid to this holy day, and with it religion and virtue to improve and gain ground in the world. But how can we expect these to amend, when men fly from the thoughts of every thing serious? When they can spare no
time

time to reflect on their spiritual concerns, and think so lightly of that which God himself hath appointed to this purpose, as to excuse themselves, upon the easiest pretences, even from the publick duties of the day?

Thirdly, besides this weekly recollection of ourselves, it will be of especial use, in our religious conduct, if at stated times we review a larger period of our life together; that we may the better observe what progress we have made, what we have gained or lost in our christian course. As almost all changes in the moral as well as animal life, are made by insensible and slow degrees, and for that reason are less observed in those with whom we daily converse; so therefore if we would know distinctly what improvements we have made, we must take some compass of time into our view, and compare our present state with some former period at a distance. The present holy season*, which the church has dedicated to the severer duties of religion, may be very suitably employed in this exercise. And it would be a very wise œconomy thus yearly to take an account of ourselves,

* This Sermon was preached in Lent.

selves, to examine carefully and impartially the state of our own hearts, what advances we have made, or whether we have gone backwards in the ways of virtue; what good habits we have formed, what bad ones we have reduced or conquered.

This will teach us where our strength and weakness lies. We shall thus enjoy the pleasure of every improvement we have made, and prepare ourselves for improving yet farther. We shall observe the snares and temptations that have before led us into error, and learn to avoid the danger for the future.

Religion must be considered as a business and employment, that requires continual care and application. Shall we, as I have already said, use such unwearied diligence to perfect ourselves in the little arts or accomplishments of this life? Shall we lay out ourselves, our whole time and pains, for a poor establishment here? And shall we allow no time or thought to learn the art of living; to practise those rules of life, and form those habits of virtue, which must fit us for eternity?
Or

Or shall we expect to attain the end of life without minding how we live; and to procure, without any price, a happiness which infinitely outweighs all we can pay?

Let me then press it strongly to you, as a question of the first and highest importance; What time have you allotted, what care employed in the performance of these duties? Or has this which is the great business of life, the very end for which we live, been indeed very little in your thoughts? If this be so, think, how can it be answered to God or your own consciences? How can we answer it as christians or as men, to lavish all our time in the pursuit of trifles, in serving divers lusts and pleasures, and to bestow no thought upon that for which the powers of thought and reason were given us? and in comparison with which nothing else indeed deserves the least thought or reflection.

Let us, if we are men, resolve to live by that reason which makes us men; which God hath set up as a light within us to guide us through this life, and to
carry

carry on our prospect, and direct our attention to the next. Let us, if we are christians, live by that faith which makes us christians; by those scriptures which God hath given us as the rule of our actions, as the model of our conduct here, and as the only condition of his favour hereafter. Let us keep this resolution and our attention to it constantly awake, by frequently considering the infinite importance of it; by frequently revolving in our minds the great doctrines of religion, the excellence and reasonableness of its precepts, and the danger of neglecting them; and by constantly attending all its sacred ordinances, the end of all which is to imprint the motives of religion deeply on the mind, and to quicken our attention to them. Let us put this resolution immediately in execution, by taking a view of our past life, and searching our hearts; and not only resolving to correct what we find amiss, but considering and immediately applying the means to this end.

If for instance we find reason to suspect our piety, let us enquire whence this want of an affection so natural and rational

onal could proceed; whence is it that others exceed us in this virtue. Is it because of the company they keep, the books they read, or the regularity of their devotion in publick and in private? Let us then imitate them in the means, if we would attain the end. Do we find reason to charge ourselves with intemperance, sensuality, or the like? Let us reflect what companies or occasions lead us chiefly into these excesses, and avoid them, as we would infection, if we mean to preserve our health. Are the tokens of an angry revengeful temper of mind upon us; and are we betrayed into these evils usually by sudden passion or surprise? Let us renew our resolutions daily against these tyrannical passions, and be watchful where we are most liable to be surpris'd. Let us guard ourselves particularly where we are under no other restraints, as for example, before our inferiours and dependants; and thus we shall prevent the frequent returns of these passions, by which they grow into habits; and by degrees reform our minds into a better temper.

Thus we may, by care and discipline, break the force of our bad habits, and
confirm

confirm ourselves in piety and every virtue. But, as the foundation of all the rest, let me earnestly intreat, that besides improving every particular occasion of considering your ways, you would constantly allot some portion of your time to this duty, to retirement and the closet. This alone, if well applied, will cure all the evils of the mind. We have only to reason and think, and in a moment the folly and absurdity of vice will appear. The pleasures of sin will not bear one thought or reflection. Let reason but speak, and they fly instantly before it. Let the sinner but view himself in this mirror, and he will be frightened by his own deformity into virtue. His past follies will fill him with shame, his future prospects with terror. Virtue alone can fill the mind with comfort, whether it reviews the past, or looks forward to the future: so true is the observation of the Roman orator and philosopher, that, 'A single day spent agreeably to her precepts, affords more pleasure to the mind than an eternity of sin and folly'.

✓

S E R M O N XVIII.

EPHES. iv. 26.

Be ye angry and sin not.

THE manner of expression in the text, being somewhat uncommon, hath given occasion to several different interpretations of it. There are some who from thinking too favourably of this dangerous passion of the mind, have construed it not only as a concession that there are some cases in which it is lawful to be angry, but as an express commission or instruction from the apostle, to be angry upon such occasions, and only to guard against sin in misplacing our resentment upon a wrong object, or from excess in the exercise of it.

But it is not probable that the apostle intended, by an express precept, to encourage a passion, which when once in
Z motion,

motion, is all of others the most difficult to be governed and restrained. It is not the part of a wise moralist to direct men to give a loose to their passions with a reserve only of some excepted cases; but on the contrary, their manner is always to deliver their precepts in general terms against sin, and to leave men to make equitable allowances, which they will be sure enough to do for themselves.

For it is certain that there are many cases in which the least degree of anger is culpable, and an angry or a contentious and impatient temper of mind, is inconsistent with the christian character. This is plainly taught us by the apostle in this chapter, v. 31. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. He therefore could not design to give countenance to this passion, by declaring that it was in all cases innocent, and only sinful when it exceeded certain limits of time or degree.

There are others in the contrary extreme, who, thinking anger in all cases
an

an unlawful principle, understand the text as spoken with an ironical meaning, to shew the absurdity of the things spoken of: Be indeed angry if ye can without sin; intimating that it is impossible in any case to be angry without incurring guilt, in the same manner as the prophet speaks, *Associate yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces: Gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces: Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought: that, as the meaning of the prophet here is, It is in vain to take counsel or to make preparations, for God hath declared it shall come to nought. So the meaning of the apostle may be, it is in vain to think of being angry without sin. But this interpretation of the words is too severe, as well as forced and unnatural. We have good reason to think that this passion is not absolutely and in itself unlawful; it is a principle of our nature worked up with our other passions and affections by the finger of God. It is doubtless designed by providence for some wise and useful purposes; and therefore when it acts within that intention, it may be safely and innocently indulged.

Z 2

The

* Isai. viii. 9, 10.

The meaning, therefore, of the apostle seems to be, neither on the one hand to encourage anger, for it wants not such encouragement; nor on the other hand absolutely to condemn it, for there are cases in which it may certainly be approved: but it is a general precept against sinful anger. The whole text is to be taken together as making up one sense, Beware of sinful anger.

In defence of this interpretation of the words, there are many texts of scripture produced, in which the like construction is necessary; in which you will be forced to run two distinct sentences or propositions into one, in order to reconcile them together, or to make consistent sense of them. Of this kind one very remarkable, which I shall mention as of near affinity with the present case, is that of St. Paul to the Romans, vi. 17, God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. In which words it is plain that the former part, however distinct it may appear from the latter, must be understood

stood as making one sentence with it. God be thanked that ye, who were sometime the servants of sin, have now obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

In treating upon this subject, I shall first enquire how far anger is in itself a lawful passion, and what are the principal ends and uses of it.

And secondly shall proceed to lay down some rules for the government and direction of it.

And first, there are many places of scripture from whence the lawfulness or indifference of anger may be indirectly concluded. When our Saviour cautions us not to be angry without a cause, and St. James admonishes us to be slow to anger, in both these places it is plainly intimated that there are circumstances and occasions in which it may be lawful to be angry; that this passion is in itself of an indifferent nature, but may become either good or bad, according as it is applied. Our blessed Lord, though he knew no sin, yet was not

without this human passion, for besides some remarkable instances, both in his words and actions, of a zeal bordering nearly upon the confines of it, it is expressly said of him, when conversing with the Pharisees, that he looked round about upon them with anger. Even God himself is frequently said in scripture to be moved with anger, which, though it is not to be understood literally, because the divine Being is pure reason unmixed with passion of every kind, is yet an argument for the lawfulness of this passion in general, since nothing absolutely sinful can be supposed in any sense to be ascribed to him in scripture. Those texts of scripture, therefore, which enjoin us to put off all these, wrath, anger, malice, and the like, must be intended against the abuses or extravagancies of this passion. Let your anger be always under the government of reason and religion, and within these limits you may safely allow it.

It is true, if we suppose this passion always connected with a desire of revenge, which for want of distinct ideas is perhaps commonly done, it must be
then

then absolutely unlawful and sinful. Nothing of personal hatred or malice can be consistent with christian principles. And it is contrary to true humanity as well as christianity, to delight in injuring or afflicting others, however we may have been provoked or injured by them. But there are many cases in which this passion discovers itself, where revenge can have no place. For instance, when we see any act of treachery, secret villainy, oppression or the like, in which we have no personal concern, yet our resentment will be moved by it, in a very sensible manner. The bare story or relation of any barbarous or malicious action, tho' the scene of action, the persons acting and suffering be wholly unknown to us; nay though the history itself be known to be artificial, and the work of imagination only, yet the bare representation of it to the mind is enough to raise anger and resentment within us. In these cases it is plainly the injustice or malice itself, abstracted from all circumstances of interest or personal concern, of friendship or enmity, which moves our passion. It is neither for his sake that did the wrong, nor for his sake

that suffered wrong, as St. Paul upon another occasion speaks. We have reason, therefore, to conclude that the proper and natural object of this passion is not only injury suffered or expected by ourselves, but malice and injustice in general, in whomsoever it is found, and to whomsoever it is directed.

Thus the most inconsiderable injury done without provocation, merely out of malice and ill-will, raises our resentment in a more sensible manner than a far greater mischief, brought upon us by the mistake or inadvertence of another, or without his design and knowledge. An injury done in a dark or treacherous manner raises our resentment higher, in proportion as the baseness or villainy of it appears greater; and still higher yet, if it be cloaked under the appearances of friendship, or done by one to whom we stand in the relation of a patron or benefactor. The sentiment of holy David in such cases seems natural and just; If it were an open enemy that had done me this dishonour, peradventure I could have born it; but it was even thou, my companion, my guide, and mine own familiar

miliar friend. These, as they must be allowed just aggravations of anger and displeasure, so they shew that it is in all cases not the real injury suffered or damage sustained, but the injustice, the moral evil that is resented in every injurious action; and that, in proportion to the quantity of malice or guilt discovered in it.

But farther it is, I think, not only injury done or intended by one man against another; but vice in general which is the object of this passion. When men abuse themselves by intemperance, excessive sensuality, or the like, though they are themselves the only persons injured, yet these crimes raise anger and indignation in every one, and a desire of seeing them punished. If it be injury in this case that we resent, it must be on the part of human nature, which is disgraced and vilified by such shameful practices, and in the honour of which it may be said we have some concern. But, from whatever principle it proceeds, the fact is, I believe, certain; that drunkenness, prostitution, and in some degree every vicious habit provokes, not the contempt

contempt only, but the indignation of every observer. And therefore it is not only injustice and malice, but every base and unworthy action that is the object of this passion.

Anger then may be defined or described to be, that general abhorrence which we have for vice and immorality excited, and shewing itself sensibly in some particular instance. Or, it is that emotion of mind which arises from a sense of any malicious or unworthy action, and which prompts us to declare our displeasure by our words or actions against it. It is of the very nature of this passion to shew itself openly : whereas reason silently condemns vice ; anger leads us, or rather with some degree of force compels us to give this testimony publickly and openly against it.

If this account of anger be just, it appears to be a generous and social principle, planted in our nature for very wise and excellent purposes. It was designed to give witness to virtue, and to point out vice as the publick enemy. Many ends of civil life are answered by

by it ; such as vindicating the innocent, and punishing the guilty. It is so far from having any thing malicious or injurious in its character, that it is the very end and intention of it to banish malice and injustice out of the world. In a word, it was designed by nature, with the other passions, to attend in the train of virtue, however it be too often seen, with the rest, to desert her interests, and rebel against her authority.

The rules for the government of this passion, which I proposed in the second place to lay down, may be reduced to these three heads ; First, such as relate to the object of it ; Secondly, the manner in which it ought to be exercised ; And, Thirdly, the measure by which it should be proportioned, limited, and restrained.

First, for the object of this passion, it is, as hath been observed, vice and malice in general. Vice is the common enemy to mankind, and therefore nature hath armed every man's hand against it : and it is as natural to us to think of it with indignation and anger, as to
have

have sentiments of honour and esteem for virtue. It is therefore agreeable to the intention of nature, that we should speak and act with a generous freedom, and with some degree of warmth and zeal against vice. It is good to be zealously affected always in a good matter. We ought not to be cold to the interests of virtue, or by our indifference or insensibility, give encouragement to vice.

This is the natural direction of this passion, but it is then misapplied when we are angry, not with the vices, but the persons of other men; when we are angry with them for their opinions, or for such actions as proceed from natural infirmity, ignorance, or mistake. It is highly unreasonable to condemn men for involuntary errors, or to resent as injuries such actions, as were done without thought or design. If malice and injustice are the proper objects of this passion, we should be particularly careful that neither injustice or malice mix with our resentments.

To prevent this misapplication of our anger, it is, first, absolutely necessary,
that

that we learn to correct as soon as may be, the first motions of it within us. These I have observed to you are in some sort mechanical and involuntary. The least hurt, disappointment, or other matter of displeasure, though it be occasioned by mere natural causes, is enough to excite this sudden warmth and emotion in us; and consequently if we indulge this blind impulse, our anger will be oftener misapplied than not. We must therefore use ourselves to check it in its first beginnings; to call in our reason immediately, either wholly to suppress, or to moderate and direct the force of it.

If we are not careful by this means to maintain the government of ourselves, but upon every occasion, or perhaps oftener upon none, give way to this passion; the frequent returns of it will encrease its power over us, till it becomes habitual and natural to us. Hence it is that we see so many persons in whom this temper seems to have worn itself into their constitutions; who find matter of quarrel and complaint in every thing that comes before them; and are from
the

the power of this principle perpetually uneasy in themselves, and troublesome and injurious to others.

When this proceeds from a real disorder of body, or a constant sense of suffering in any kind, it may be in some degree excused; when men are not in a condition to receive pleasure from any thing, it is no wonder they are easily displeased. Yet even in this case we have no license to revenge the pain or grief we feel, upon those who were not the authors of it: and even to repine, and murmur within ourselves is not consistent with that meekness and resignation, which is a christian duty in such circumstances.

But generally speaking, this temper of mind is entirely of our own making; it has grown up like our other habits, by encouragement and indulgence; and therefore we ought to take the shame and guilt of it to ourselves. In many it is nothing but pride, and an imperious temper, which arrogates every thing to itself, and delights in pouring out reproach, and menaces, and the signs of contempt

contempt upon others. It is a foolish way of proclaiming their importance to the world, and the sense they have of their own worth and sufficiency; but which, like all other perversions of the passions, is sure to miss its proposed end; for instead of procuring that extraordinary deference and respect which it challenges, it infallibly provokes contempt and ridicule.

If then we would maintain the government of ourselves, and not be enslaved by this tyrannical passion, we must be careful to check the first motions of it, by calling in our reason as soon as may be, to our assistance. And if it has in any degree gained the power of an habit over us, we must be the more watchful against it, and endeavour, by degrees, to reduce and subdue it,

A second means necessary to prevent the frequent misapplication of our anger, is to keep ourselves as free as possible from all personal prejudice; from the prejudices of pride and partiality to ourselves, and of hatred and enmity to others.

A second means necessary to prevent the frequent misapplication of our anger, is to keep ourselves as free as possible from all personal prejudice, from the prejudices of pride and partiality to ourselves, of hatred and enmity to others.

If we have too high an opinion of ourselves, we shall be apt to misconstrue many indifferent and innocent actions into crimes, we shall interpret the least slight or thoughtless neglect, as an intended affront. Where men expect submission, and a servile complaisance as their due, justice and common civility will not content them. In like manner where we have a personal dislike, and have, with or without reason, taken offence at another, all his actions will be apt to displease us, we shall find something wrong in every thing he does, every accidental miscarriage will be heightened into a crime, and every real fault be aggravated beyond the truth. The natural consequence of which is, that we shall be very free in dealing out our censure, our anger will be often excited without a cause, and will rise higher when

when there is just occasion given for it than it ought.

Equally necessary is it if we would pass a right judgment upon the actions of others, that we be free from all prejudice against them. We should in the case of others, make the same reasonable allowances for weakness and infirmity which we naturally do in our own. We should take in all the circumstances that may extenuate and alleviate the supposed fault, and not dwell only on those which aggravate and inflame it. Where a man has, by his past behaviour, justly forfeited our esteem, we should still reflect that one, or a few bad actions, are not always a proof that the whole man is corrupt, that the best of men offend in many things, and that even in the worst there is some room to hope for amendment. And therefore, the failings which a man has been guilty of, are not a reason for condemning the other actions of his life; nor, because he has in some instances been bad, should we conclude him incapable of any thing that is good, much less should every little failing alienate our good opinion and affection

A a

fection from him. In a word, we should in all cases distinguish betwixt the offender and the offence; and however we may hate and detest the vice, we should retain our charity for the offender, should pity him, and refrain from all personal hatred and animosity.

Under this head I must observe, that as we ought to guard against the misrepresentations which our own pride or prejudice may make of the actions of other men, so we should be very backward in believing the whispers or reports of others, concerning them. These are, for the most part, ill grounded, and the best of men have in their turns suffered under them. There are persons who delight in depreciating the best characters, and who recommend themselves to weak people, by insinuating that others have not so great a regard for them as they ought. By this means jealousies and suspicions are created betwixt the best friends, and our resentments fall often on those to whom the least coldness would be cruelty and injustice; according to the observation of the wise man, A froward man soweth strife, and a whisperer separateth chief friends.* We should, therefore,

* Prov. xvi. 28.

fore, if we would not be unjust in our anger, be extremely careful to guard against this source of prejudice. Admonish thy friend, says the son of Sirach, it may be he hath not done it; and if he have, that he do it not again. Admonish thy friend, it may be it is a slander, and believe not every tale. And this is perhaps the meaning of the precept which follows the text, which may be rendered, neither give place to the slanderer, that is, give not way to the suggestions of the slanderer, who would raise causeless jealousies and resentments in you; for though the words are otherwise rendered in our translation, yet this sense is equally agreeable to the original and to the context.

The rules which we were in the second place to lay down, for the conduct of our anger, were such as relate to the manner in which it ought to be exercised. The principal ends for which this passion seems designed, are to defeat and disarm malice and injustice, and to correct and punish vice of every kind. The manner, therefore, in which it is conducted, should be such as is best adapted

dapted to answer these ends. The first of these hath respect to the person injured ; the second to the injurious or offending person.

First with respect to the person injured by another. It is a proper exercise of this passion to defend him from injury, by opposing ourselves to the attacks of his enemy, and helping him to repel his force. The foundation of our anger in these cases, is the injustice that is done or threatened to our neighbour ; if, therefore, we would be consistent with ourselves, we ought to do him all the justice we can, and, as far as lies in our power, to prevent or redress the injury he receives. If his good name be blackened by calumny and slander, we ought not to be unconcerned, or sit by unmoved ; it is a duty to which this passion will prompt every good man to wipe off the aspersion, and to vindicate his innocence. If the hand of rapine and violence be upon him, it is becoming our zeal to interpose in protecting him, to deliver the poor when he crieth, from him that is too strong for him, the needy also, and him that hath no helper, from the
the

the spoiler and oppressor. I need not add, that when we are ourselves injured, it is lawful for us to vindicate our persons and characters from abuse, or in other cases to do ourselves right by legal methods. But it is in no case lawful to return evil for evil; and so far should we be from a litigious temper, that we should rather, for the sake of peace, suffer wrong in less matters, than have recourse to justice from a principle of revenge. This is the meaning of our Saviour in that remarkable precept, If a man strike thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also; and if he sue thee at the law for thy cloak, let him have thy coat also; intimating that it is a point of christian prudence and charity, sometimes to submit to the unjust pretensions of others, rather than to live in a state of hatred and enmity with them; and that it is better to bear a second injury, than to revenge the first.

With respect to the person who is the subject of our resentment, our behaviour is to be adjusted by this rule. We should use all such means, and no other, as are likely to reclaim him, or prevent
his

his being farther injurious to others. And these are chiefly reproof and correction. The first of these is not only consistent with christian charity, but is indeed one of the best offices of it. As such it is prescribed in the Levitical Law, and confirmed by many passages in the New Testament; Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy brother, and not suffer sin upon him. Whenever, therefore, we are offended at the wicked or injurious behaviour of another, it is a proper expression of our anger to admonish him of his fault; to represent to him in its proper colours the guilt and deformity of it; and if need be to expostulate with warmth and freedom upon the several aggravations under which it appears; the horror and detestation which it raises in every good man, and the dangerous consequences that attend it. So far our anger is justifiable and proper; but it is then ill conducted, when instead of amicable reproof, it breaks out in reproachful language, or expressions of contempt and bitterness; because this, instead of answering the good ends intended by it, will entirely defeat them; instead of winning

ning our brother over to a better mind, the natural effect of it is to exasperate and harden him the more in his wickedness. It will be in vain for us to plead a regard to his character, his present or future welfare, when our behaviour convinces him that we dislike his person more than his faults, and reprove him not so much from a desire of reclaiming or doing him service, as to give vent to our own malice and ill nature.

A second instance, which I mentioned as a proper expression of our anger, was correcting and punishing vice. Where publick justice demands it, we ought to assist as far as the laws require in the punishment of the offender: and our anger ought to overbalance that weak compassion which would spare the guilty at the hazard and expense of the innocent. In this sense, indignation against vice, and even revenge, are spoken of by the apostle, with allowance and approbation: *Behold, says he, speaking of that zeal which the Corinthians had shewn against an offending brother, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what

* 2 Cor. vii. 11.

what revenge ! And the magistrate is said to be an avenger, to execute wrath upon every soul of man that doeth evil. In these places a publick spirit against vice, and even the inflicting punishment, or taking revenge upon it in a judicial way, is recommended to us, as a proper method of expressing our detestation against sin. And as it is indeed necessary to provide for the security, peace, and good order of society, so far as our anger conduces to these ends, it is certainly allowable, and in its proper sphere.

But revenge, properly speaking, or a delight in punishing or inflicting misery on our fellow creatures, is absolutely unlawful, and what no circumstances of provocation can justify to our reason. We are commanded in numberless places of scripture, not to return evil for evil, to forgive the greatest injuries, how often soever repeated, to overcome evil with good, not to forgive only, but to love our enemies. I shall, therefore, without multiplying texts of scripture to this purpose, which might be done without end, conclude this head with observing, that we ought, in punishing or delivering o-
thers

thers to public justice, to have solely in view what is undoubtedly the only end of all penal laws, not to inflict misery or torment on the sufferer, so much as to reclaim him from his offences, to prevent his being farther injurious to society, or to deter others, by his example, from the like.

I come now in the third place to lay down some rules for the measure of our anger, or to mark the bounds and limits, within which it ought to be restrained. And here the same general rule is again applicable, which was before given for the conduct of this passion; it ought to be kept within the bounds of justice and prudence, so as best to answer the ends intended by it, of defeating malice and discouraging vice of every kind. But to be more particular;

It ought first in all cases to be proportioned justly to the guilt and demerit of every vicious action. Our anger should not go before, or rise higher in any case, than reason directs. We should carefully separate in every action what is good

B b

or

or indifferent, from what is bad; and should first consider the several circumstances that may be pleaded in excuse and mitigation of the fault, before we give sentence upon it. When we suffer in our own persons, we should consider not the evil that is brought upon us; as a ground of resentment, but what there is of malice and evil intention in the author of it. This will make a considerable abatement in our resentments, and prevent a thousand occasions of repentance, which a rash, precipitate anger will be apt to betray us into.

Secondly, with respect to its continuance; it ought never to dwell long on the mind, lest it settle at last into a hatred and enmity of our brethren. This we are taught in the words immediately following the text, Let not the sun go down upon your wrath; a proverbial expression, implying that this passion is never to be cherished or indulged. There is danger if it be long entertained there, lest it become habitual, degenerate into revenge, and extinguish that charity which is the great distinction of christianity.

Lastly,

Lastly, I must mention it as a rule for the measure of our anger, that our own innocence and freedom from guilt bear proportion to it. We cannot consistently declare against vice, and condemn it in others, unless we are exempt from blame ourselves. Nor is it enough that we be free from the faults only which we condemn. It seems indeed a grosser hypocrisy to condemn the same vices which we are guilty of ourselves: but to a man of a very little reflection the absurdity will appear nearly the same, whether we are guilty of those or of others equally blameable. Vice in general, not this or that, but every species of it in its several degrees, is the object of anger and aversion. In proportion, therefore, as we merit blame and anger for our own sins, we should be sparing and merciful to those of others. In proportion as our resentment rises against the faults of others, we should be severe to our own. Let us then, before we deal out our censure and anger against others, turn them in upon ourselves. Let us learn from that generous scorn and indignation

dignation with which we naturally and necessarily resent vice in others, to abhor and condemn it in ourselves. And let us be warned betimes, by that voice of nature which so loudly condemns every instance of vice here, that it will as certainly be condemned by the voice of God hereafter.

THE END,

